

**AUTHENTICITY IS THE NEW  
BULLSHIT**

# AUTHENTICITY IS THE NEW BULLSHIT

NOTES ON THE ART OF  
NOT SUCKING

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# Contents

INTRODUCTION	iv
1. PART ONE: CREATIVITY	1
2. PART TWO: MASTERY	7
3. PART THREE: MEANING	20
4. PART FOUR: RANDOM ADVICE	32
ABOUT HUGH MACLEOD	39
	102



# INTRODUCTION



When I was attending University in the 1980's, I went and got a suit-and-tie summer job in a large office in downtown Houston, doing white-collar drudgery for a big oil company.

It sucked.

That summer, I was also in a painful, Nowheresville relationship with a lovely young woman. That also sucked.

## 2 Authenticity Is The New Bullshit

That year my college grades sucked, as well. As did my social life and financial situation.

The whole year sucked, frankly. I sucked, my job sucked, my love life sucked, my situation sucked. Sucked, sucked, sucked.

Two decades later, I'm frankly still quite traumatized by it. Ha.

Since then, I've spent a great deal of time and energy trying to figure out how to keep myself out of jobs, careers, relationships and situations that suck, how to keep life from sucking in general.

Learning how to NOT SUCK is one of our most important pursuits.

Sucking is the enemy. Indeed.

So when I was recently asked to give a talk to marketing students at Unibe University in the Dominican Republic, I decided that helping them learn "The Art Of Not Sucking" would be far more useful for them, or at least, welcome, than the usual textbook marketing stuff they have to read on a daily basis.

Let's face it, "Success" and "Failure" are still too far away in the distant future to be truly tangible most young adults, they've still got way too much in front of them. That was certainly true in my case, and every other case I knew well at the time.

However, leaving the comfy surroundings of college life and hitting the adult world and finding out right away that you suck at everything? That everything is going to suck from now on?

"What if I suck?" That's a real burning issue.

With graduation looming, that's what college seniors are REALLY worried about. I speak truth.

College kids aren't afraid of failing, they're afraid of sucking.

The talk I gave to the kids was so much fun, I thought I'd spread the love some more, by turning my notes into a little e-book and sharing

it with everybody. This is it. I hope it's helpful; thanks for taking the time to download it.

[NB: Many of the themes below were covered before, in both [my blog](#) and [my other books](#), some points more than others. If you experience déjà vu, that is why. Secondly, to make it more fun to read, I did my usual thing i.e. randomly inserted some of my favorite recent cartoons in the mix, similar to how *The New Yorker* inserts unrelated cartoons into their pages.]



### “SUCCESS IS EASY”

Don't let the drama queens and marketing dorks fool you, success is actually pretty easy... or at least, simple. It basically has four elements:

#### 4 Authenticity Is The New Bullshit

- i. Work hard.
- ii. Be nice.
- iii. Have great product or service.
- iv. *Don't suck.*

Of the four, “Don’t suck” is the most daunting. The other three are fairly straightforward.

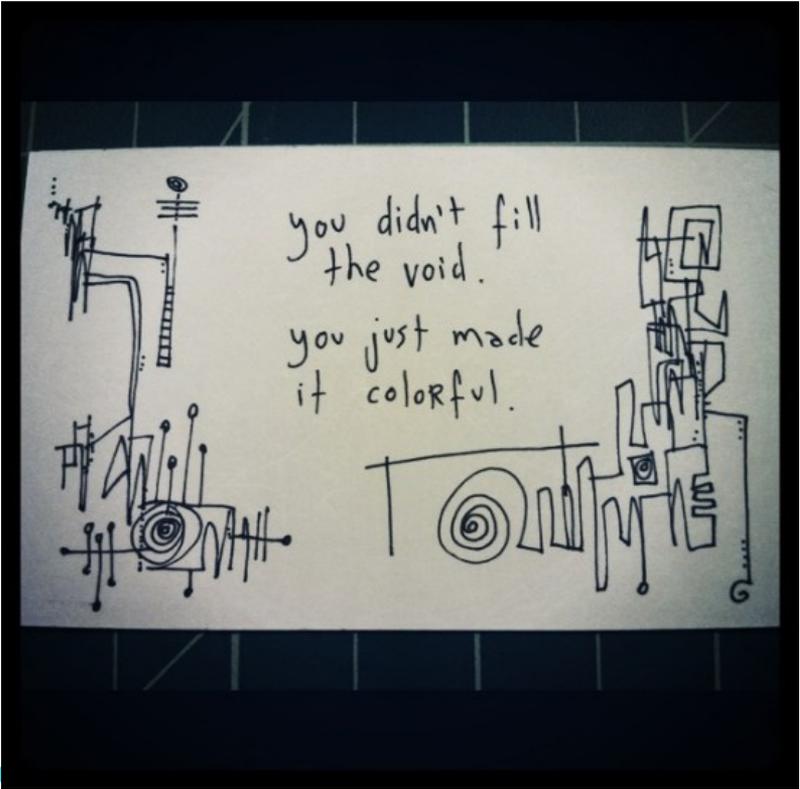
“Work hard” and “Be nice” are just a matter of personal choice. Having a great product is just a matter of having enough perseverance, and a little bit of luck.

Whereas “Don’t suck” is really, really hard for most people. It’s the one most of us trip over. Especially the drama queens and marketing dorks.

To be successful, first you need to learn how to not suck.

You need to learn *The Art Of Not Sucking*.

After that, the rest should take care of itself.



### *THE THREE ELEMENTS OF NOT SUCKING*

For sake of brevity, I narrowed “Not Sucking” down to three elements. “Not Sucking” is much easier with these three, much, much harder without them:

**i. CREATIVITY**

**ii. MASTERY**

**iii. MEANING**

There's also a fourth section,

**iv. RANDOM ADVICE**

which is also the longest section. It seemed like a good idea at the time.

And with that, my friends, let the adventure begin!

## PART ONE: CREATIVITY



“Creativity” just means the ability to come up with original, useful ideas. It could be through the art of painting, starting a company or designing car engines. It could be just an innovative way of how you

do your nine-to-five job at the office or how you make coffee for your customers at Starbucks.

Thought “Creativity” is a messy, loaded, overused word, it’s also what our brains were actually designed for.

Creativity is who we are at our deepest, biological level. That’s why everybody is given a box of crayons in Kindergarten. This is what allowed our ancestors to discover how to make a fire, paint the occasional Sistine Chapel or learn that the earth was round.

People who want a more thorough overview of creativity should perhaps read my first book, [“Ignore Everybody”](#), but here are some general pointers to get you started:



### 1. *CLIMB YOUR OWN MOUNT EVEREST.*

Like I said in “Ignore Everybody”, everybody has their own private Mount Everest they were put on this earth to climb.

Some kind of personal heroic quest, as it were.

For me, that meant getting good as a cartoonist. For others, it could have something to do with starting a business, getting a PhD in Linguistics, becoming the most kick-ass divorce lawyer in town or learning to play violin. It doesn't matter what it is, what matters is that it's a manifestation of our higher selves; it's the one big deed that we want to be remembered for. It's the thing you need to do if you want to eventually take leave of this world, knowing you managed to play your best game.

Most people don't try to climb their own Mount Everest, or at least, they give up on it far too early. They get busy with jobs, family, TV, shopping, eating tacos, drinking beer and all the usual stuff.

And most people who end up never climbing it, do so because they didn't realize it was there in the first place. Admitting that it's there is a scary and uncertain business. Admitting that it's there is half the battle.



## 2. "LEARN HOW TO INVENT"

This is the advice I witnessed the esteemed CNN news correspondent, David Gergen give a small group of young entrepreneurs at a talk in Boston not long ago:

"Learn how to invent, that's the only advice I really have to give you."

Simple? Yes. Easy? No.

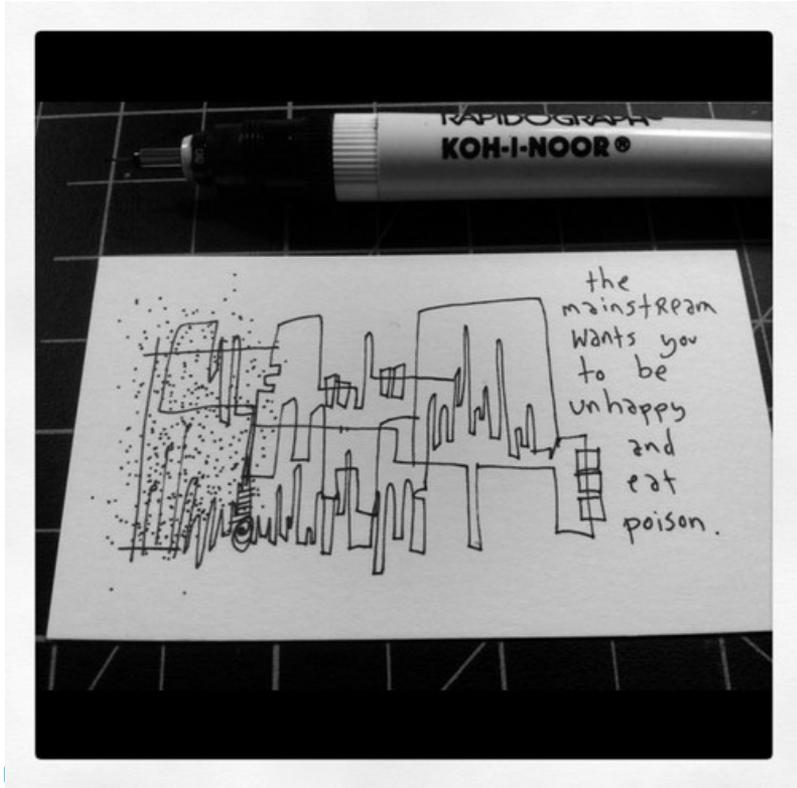
Gergen is a very clever and accomplished fellow. He could have suggested much more that evening; he basically chose not to. Why was that?

Because once you learn how to invent, the rest of the world's opportunities open up to you in Glorious Technicolor. If don't learn, there's not much anyone can do to help you, except maybe help you lift some random rock to crawl under.

Harsh but true.

The good news is, you don't need to be Albert Einstein, Picasso or some other god-genius to invent something. You can be anybody, and you can do it anywhere. On the job or after hours. Working as a cog in a big corporation or painting unknown masterpieces in a garret. Scale doesn't matter, mindset matters. Decision matters.

To invent means to create a thing of beauty, large or small, in a place where beauty was lacking.



***3. DON'T WAIT TO BE TOLD WHAT TO DO, DON'T WAIT FOR PERMISSION***

The world will always conspire to make you less than you are. Even the well-intentioned parts of it. The question is, do you let it?

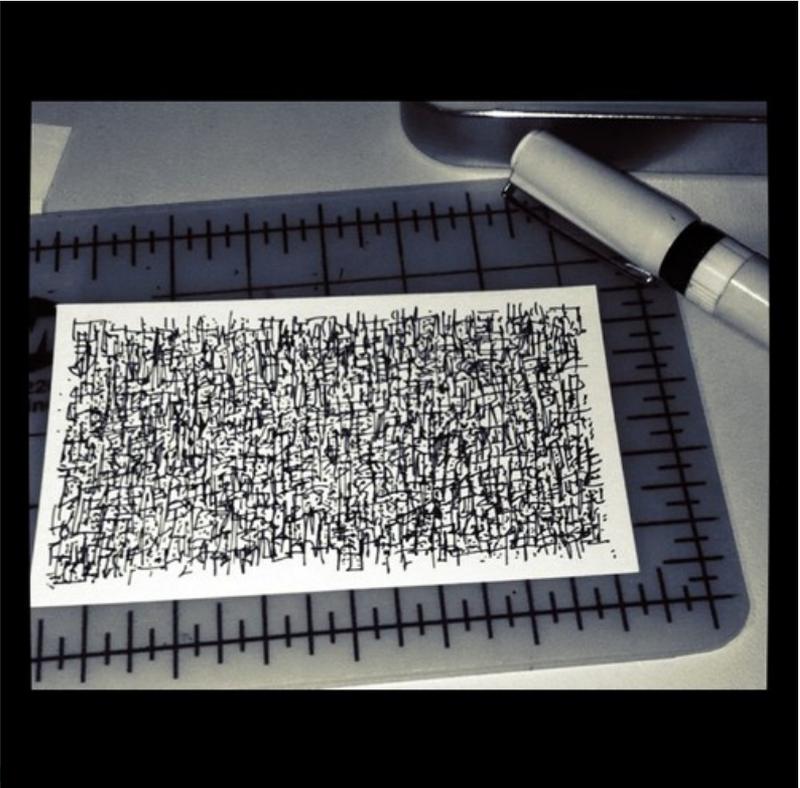
You have to decide.

Generally, the real world doesn't go out of its way to tell you to go create something useful and/or meaningful. Usually, it just tells you to keep your nose down and don't rock the boat. The fact that the latter could quickly destroy your soul in the process is irrelevant to them.

So I'm afraid it's you who must take the initiative; I am equally afraid that it's you who has to take the heat if things go terribly wrong.

The good news is, things don't always go wrong forever. And a few bumps along the way is the best education known to man.

The only alternative is crawling under that aforementioned rock. And you don't want that. No.



#### *4. DON'T WAIT TO BE DISCOVERED*

Before the Internet came along, I spent a lot of time sending my cartoons off to publishers, hoping to get the fish to bite. They didn't, for

the most part. Sure, I got a few nibbles here and there, but not nearly enough to support myself spiritually nor professionally.

So I did what all young, renounced starving artists do, I got a day job. In advertising.

Yes. It sucked. And quickly.

As much as I tried my best in that very interesting industry, I was never very good at it. Oh, well, live and learn. At least it gave me a GREAT education, and I met a lot of smart, lovely people along the way.

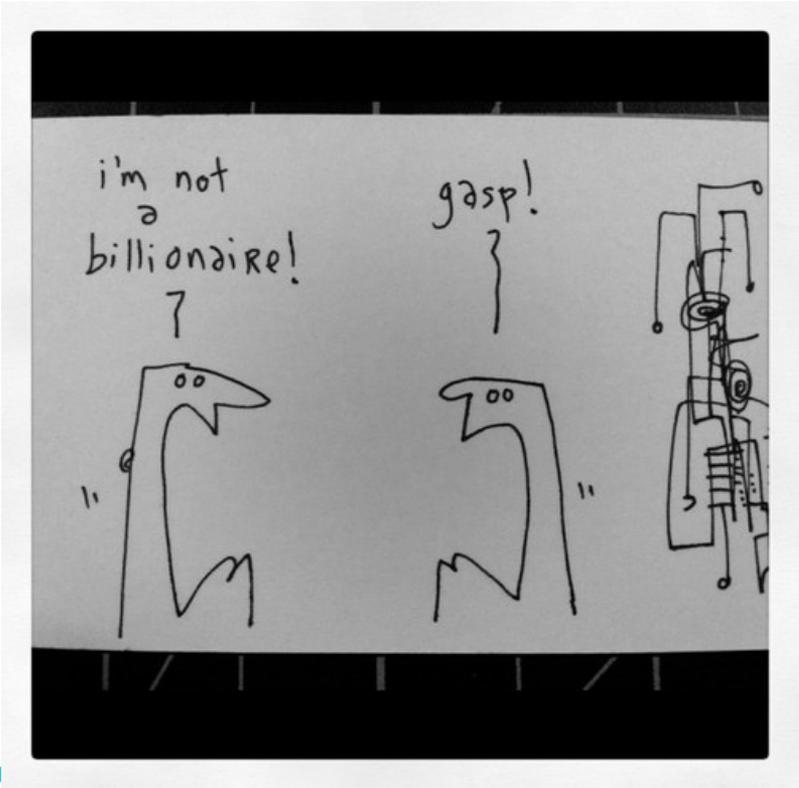
Luckily, the Internet came along and, no longer willing to wait around to be discovered by some hypothetical big-shot, I just started publishing my cartoons on my blog, [gapingvoid](#).

Hey, it worked (EVENTUALLY).

gapingvoid became a pretty big success story. With the help of my business partner, Jason Korman and our team, I now make a great living, doing what I love, with a fantastic fan base. Happy ending.

My advice is, you're much better off starting something yourself and, if you still need help scaling it, *only then* do you take it to the guys with the big offices.

Don't go there until you don't really need them anyway, until you can leave money on the table any time. Otherwise you'll be little more than fresh meat to them.



### 5. "GOOD IDEAS HAVE LONELY CHILDHOODS."

This was the main thesis of *Ignore Everybody*: That great ideas don't start out life being that obvious to most people. It's only in retrospect that they take on that delicious, million-dollar obviousness that we all know, love and read about in the papers.

But knowing that it's perfectly normal to feel isolated and ignored in the early days a new idea's life, simply makes it more likely that it will happen (or at the very least, much easier to bear).

It's when you feel "This should not be happening", that's when you're most likely to give up.

People are far more willing to put up with unpleasant experiences, like the loneliness of a good idea, if they think it's a normal part of being human.

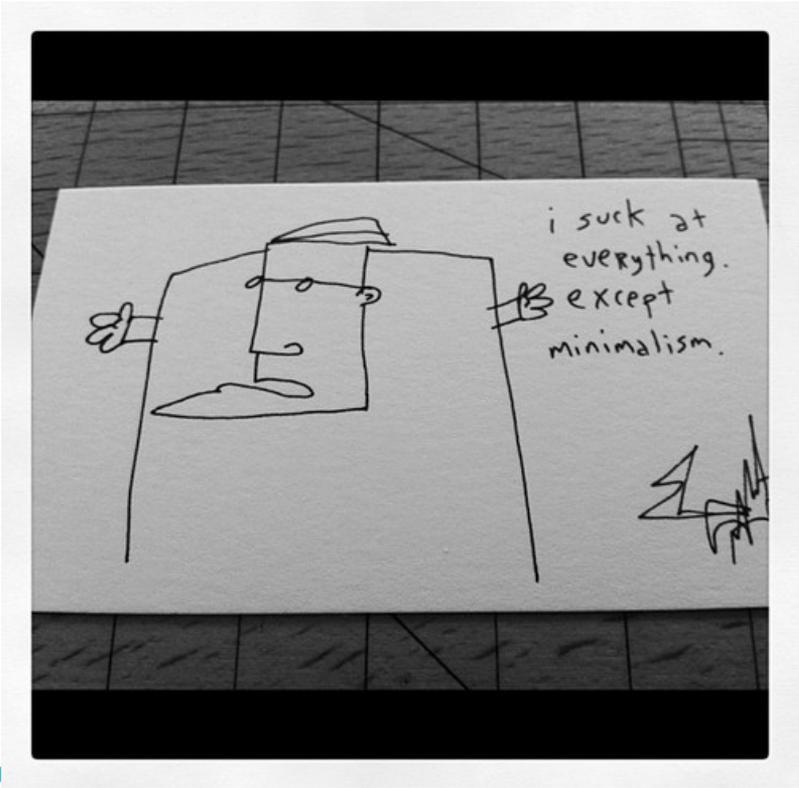
Losing your shirt in the stock market is far worse if you're the only one doing it. If millions of you lose out because of some massive world event causes the Dow Jones to plummet, that's much easier to bear individually.

Same with childbirth. If you were the only woman who ever felt pain doing it, it would be a problem. But you're not, so it's not, either.

Some things are really just bigger than we are, so there's no point taking it personally.

Therefore, when the first pangs of lonely isolation hit you when you embark on your life's great adventure, just remember that you're actually not really alone; that you're swimming in a great sea of normal...

And that it's wonderful.

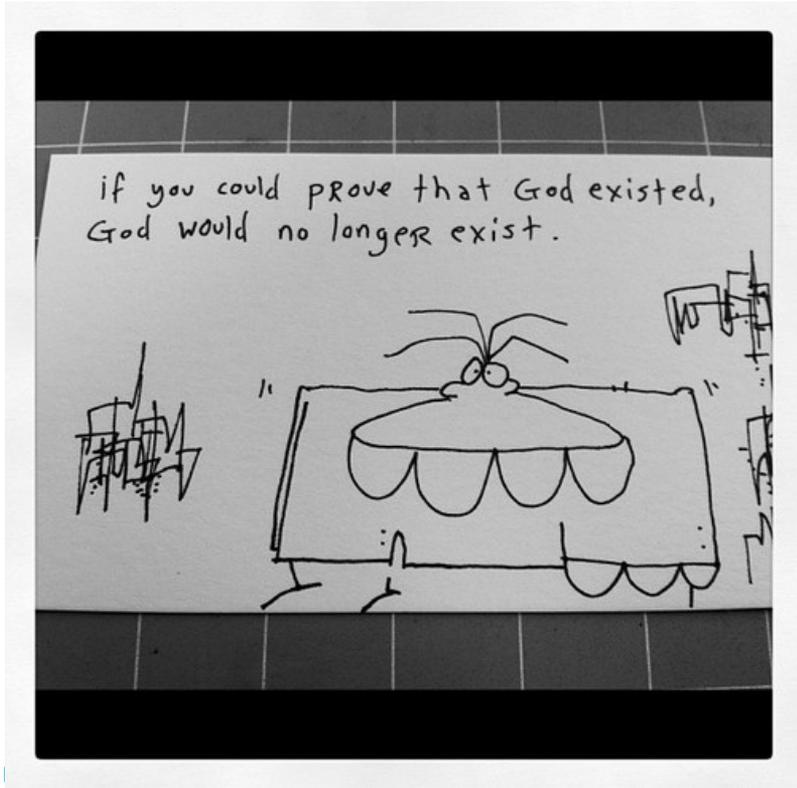


## 6. AVOID THE WATERCOOLER GANG

This was another tidbit from Ignore Everybody. In most organizations, not everybody is out to “*make a dent in the universe*”. Sadly, some people are only there for the paycheck. Their job is just a means to an end, not an expression of anything truly meaningful.

A lot of these people may be smart, nice, happy and productive enough, but be careful letting their worldview seep into yours. One day you’ll look back on your life and realize your life could’ve been so much more than just a stack of pay slips.

But by then it’ll be too late, sadly. By then a big part of you will feel empty inside, and will mourn bitterly forever.



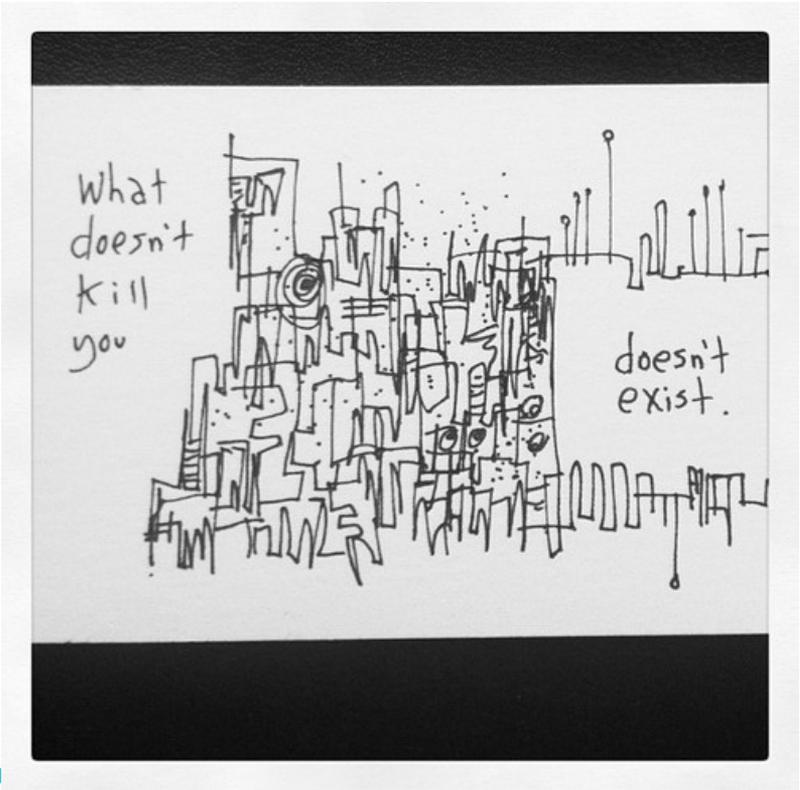
### *7. HAVE BOUNDARIES*

The successful, creative life needs to know clearly where lies the red line, the one that separates what you're willing to do from what you're not.

Regardless of what specific compromises one is asked to make in order to pursue one's dream, the likelihood is that there will be a lot of them; that they will be never-ending.

Personally, I'm more than happy to do work for large corporations, i.e. cartoon commissions. I am unwilling to do work I despise, no matter how much they're paying. Luckily, I let my clients know this well in advance. It's give and take.

It's too easy to let the easy path boil your life slowly, like a frog. Choosing not to is harder than it looks. Be forewarned.



#### 8. "BE SECRET, AND EXULT" –WB. YEATS

This quote by William Butler Yeats is one of my all-time favorites. To paraphrase badly— Savor obscurity while it last, be joyful in the process; you'll never have that opportunity to create such new work, new life, ever again.

It's hard to be creative when everybody's watching you, with everybody expecting ever more unlikely miracles from you. Fame and fortune opens a lot of doors, true, but it's pretty good at closing some others, as well. Be careful.

## PART TWO: MASTERY



### 9. LEARN FROM JIRO

The best way to not suck is to MASTER something useful. Obvious, yes?

**“I fell in love with my work and gave my life to it.” — Jiro Ono.**

Like everybody else I know, I give a lot of thought to “Success”. What does it take to be successful, prosperous, happy, have a sense of purpose etc? What does THAT actually look like?

And by successful, I don’t mean “lucky”. I don’t mean people born rich, or the lottery winners. That kind of success never comes from within, that kind of success is too external and random to bother worrying about. That kind of success is something you don’t control.

Of course, the media LOVE success models of the outrageously fortunate— celebrity artists, celebrity businessmen, celebrity spiritual leaders, celebrity rich kids, lottery winners, not to mention the Reality TV, famous-for-being-famous crowd.

The thing is, I know TONS of super successful people, but none of them fit this extreme, celeb-lottery-winner-Reality-TV model. Some of them are actually pretty boring, to be honest. But they lead happy, friendly lives and do VERY well career-wise.

THAT is what most success looks like, if you think about it. The stuff on TV or in the movies just isn’t REAL enough for us to learn that much useful stuff from.

So I was thinking about this again, recently, HARD.

What model would work for folk like you and me? A model that didn’t mean you had to sell your soul to Wall Street, Hollywood, Washington or the tabloids? A success model that doesn’t rely solely on the unlikelihood of outrageously good fortune or acts of evil?

Then quite by chance, I saw a great documentary recently: [“Jiro Dreams of Sushi”](#), a film about the world’s greatest sushi master, and a light bulb EXPLODED in my head.

Our man, 85-year-old Jiro Ono is the world’s greatest sushi chef— the only sushi master to ever have been awarded three Michelin stars. He’s also the oldest person to have ever been a recipient of that award.

The thing is, he doesn't have a lot of money or own a fleet of trendy restaurants in all the world's capitals, a-la Wolfgang Puck. No syndicated TV shows, celebrity-chef book deals or TV talk-show circuits, either.

He just has just a small, plain, dull, ordinary-looking, low-key sushi bar with ten seats in the basement of a Tokyo office building, near the subway, the kind of nondescript place you'd probably just walk by without stopping, if you saw it. Ten seats! Yet he REALLY IS the best in the world at what he does.

Jiro works seven days a week, over 350 days a year (he hates taking vacation), serves sushi and sashimi to people in very small numbers, and THAT'S IT. Just sushi. No salad, no appetizers, no deserts.

Like I said, JUST SUSHI. And by sticking to this minimalist, bare-bones formula, he's become the best in the world.

A tiny little sushi bar in some random subway station. Yet Heads of State eat there, people wait in line, people book a stool at his sushi bar as much as a year in advance, at prices starting around \$600 a head. People have been known to fly all the way from America or Europe, just to experience a 20-minute meal. In a basement!

I was lucky enough to have a similar experience first-hand when about eight years ago, I started working with the English Savile Row tailors. They make the best suits in the world; all hand-made, they go for about \$5000 a pop.

The tailors have a similar shtick as Jiro. They're generally not that rich, their businesses are tiny, yet the great and the good worship at their feet. With celebrities, captains of industry, people who are also world-class at what they do, (like Jiro's customers) waiting as long as a year in advance to get their next suit.

Like Jiro, the tailors just get up every morning and do their thing, day-in-day-out, humbly, quietly, without a lot of fanfare, totally dedicated to their jobs. I've seen it. On the surface, it's quiet, calm and kinda dull.

And like Jiro, from my observations they seem to have this sense of inner satisfaction my Wall Street trader friends (who easily make ten times as much, on a good day) can only dream of.

So as a result, Jiro and the Savile Row tailors are the people I really try to emulate. Because it's doable. I can do that. I may never be as rich as Steve Jobs or Warren Buffet, I may never be literally a rock star like Bono or Jagger, I may not be as talented as Picasso or Whitman, but I can be like Jiro and the savile Row tailors... or at least, more like them.

So like them, I live quietly, I get up every morning and quietly get on with the business cranking out my product, my cartoons. Like I said, it's quiet, calm and kinda dull.

So what's their secret? THE secret? What is the secret sauce that lets these otherwise quite ordinary people like Jiro and the tailors, lead such extraordinary lives?

In a word: MASTERY. They've MASTERED something. Something interesting and valuable. They are MASTERS of their craft. It may be an old-fashioned word that makes people uncomfortable, but that's only because it's something that eludes most people.

Though, having watched these masters carefully first-hand, I can honestly say MASTERY is more satisfying than money. If you're up for it, yes, MASTERY MATTERS MORE THAN MONEY, MASTERY MATTERS MORE THAN SUCCESS.

And it's portable. It travels with you, wherever you go. No landlord, no boss, no recession, no round of layoffs, no Wall Street analyst, no newspaper critic can take it away. It's something that truly belongs to you, for always.

You earned it. It's yours. Forever.

So when a young person asks me for career advice these days, I tell her, "Don't worry so much about money, fame, success, rockstardom, whatever. Worry about achieving Mastery— that is something precious you

can actually control. And yes, if you've truly achieved Mastery, you're more likely to be successful and prosperous and rockstar, anyway."

AGAIN, MASTERY MATTERS MORE THAN SUCCESS. So go for it.



### 10. CIRCUMVENT YOUR OWN LIMITATIONS

Glasgow artist, [David Shrigley](#) is one of my favorite cartoonists. And I have very few of those.

Unlike a lot of my cartoonist heroes (Steinberg, Gorey etc) David can't draw to save his life, at least, not in the conventional sense. His formal

drafting skills (the ones he chooses to show the world, anyway) are just plain bad. I mean, REALLY bad.

And you know what? It doesn't matter. Actually, it may even be a good thing.

You see, the whole point of Dave's work is NOT about the drawing. It's ALL about his ideas.

And his VERY crude drawings work brilliantly for that. In fact, I'd wager that if his drafting skills were more formally developed, his cartoons wouldn't be nearly as sharp, as interesting or wickedly subversive.

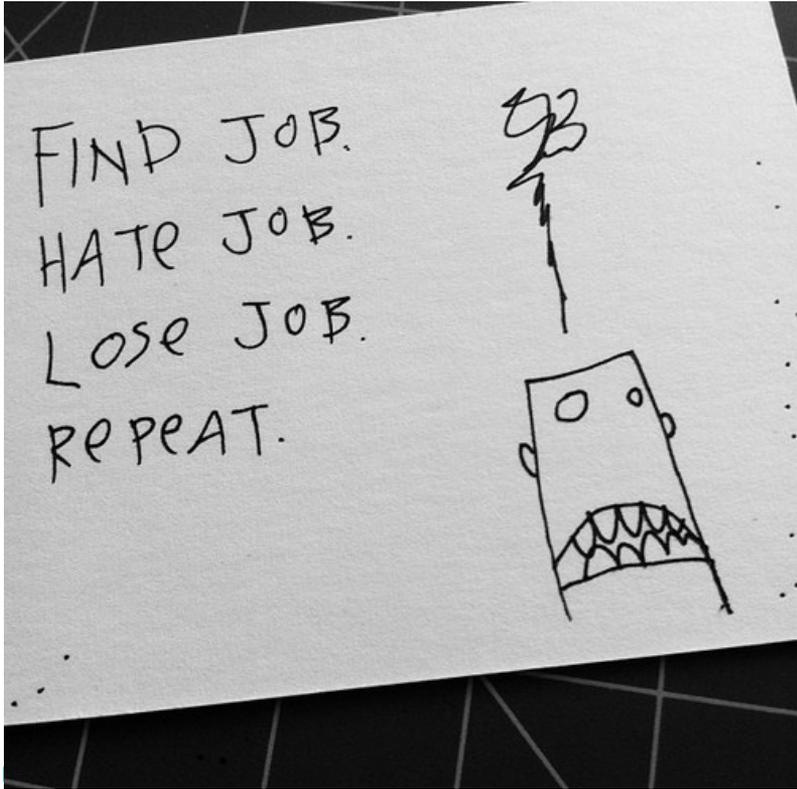
His is a great example of what I like to call "circumventing one's limitations". Turning weaknesses into strength. Shrigley is a master of that, he really is.

And yes, I think if you're to achieve mastery in your craft, your job or your career, you have to learn how to do what David did: Circumvent.

You also have to be determined and relentless. David is all that as well, as this interview nicely demonstrates.

Even if you can't draw to save your life. Even if you didn't go to the right university. Even if you're not that good at making money. Even if you have an average IQ. Even if you can't get venture funding. Even if you weren't born insanely talented at something. Even if you have to wait tables or bartend for a couple of years.

Circumvent, relentlessly.



### 11. MASTERY IS BORING

*INTRODUCING THE 20,000 HOUR RULE... 10,000 TO MASTER THE CRAFT, ANOTHER 10,000 TO MASTER THE BUSINESS.*

The 10,000 Hours Rule was made famous by Malcolm Gladwell in his book, "Outliers".

The book talks about how it takes 10,000 hours working at something to really master it. (10,000 hours means a couple of hours a day for decade, roughly). And he cites people like Bill Gates and The Beatles to prove his case. It's a good read.

Ten thousand sounds about right to me... though I prefer “The 20,000 Hour Rule”.

It took me 10K hours to get good at cartooning, but then it took me the same amount of time again to figure out the business.

Even then, I still feel I have a long way to go.

It takes about 10 years to become a Savile Row tailor, that is, assuming you have both the talent, the will and the stamina to go the entire apprenticeship. Most kids don't, which is why the trade is slowly dying out: They can't find enough young talent to replace the old ones when they retire.

Coincidentally enough, according to the movie, that's also how long an apprenticeship at Jiro's lasts.

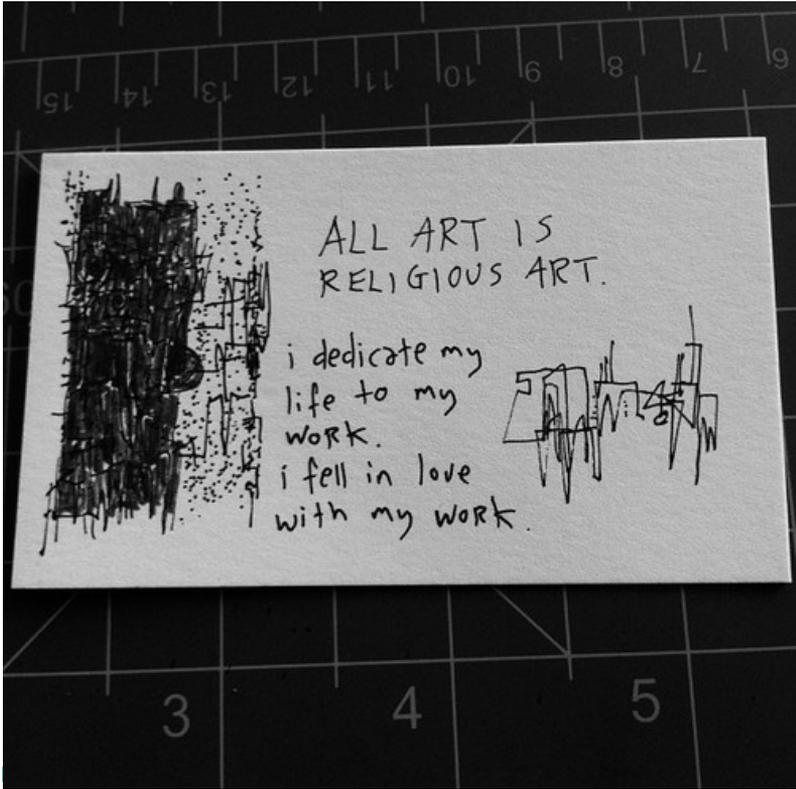
I once met a master gunsmith from Holland & Holland, the makers of those famously exquisite, \$100,000 English hand-made shotguns.

For his first assignment as a young apprentice, he was given a two-inch steel cube and metal file. He was told from the guy training him, that as soon as he could turn the two-inch cube into a one-inch cube, using nothing but his file, he could have his second lesson.

It took him two years to get to Lesson Number Two.

Two years of filing that same damn cube, eight hours day. Until the Master said OK.

It was “Wax-on, Wax-off” for only a couple of days in the movie. The gunsmith apprentice did it for two whole years. Think about it.



[Note: If you like what you see, please subscribe to [my daily cartoon newsletter](#), thanks.]

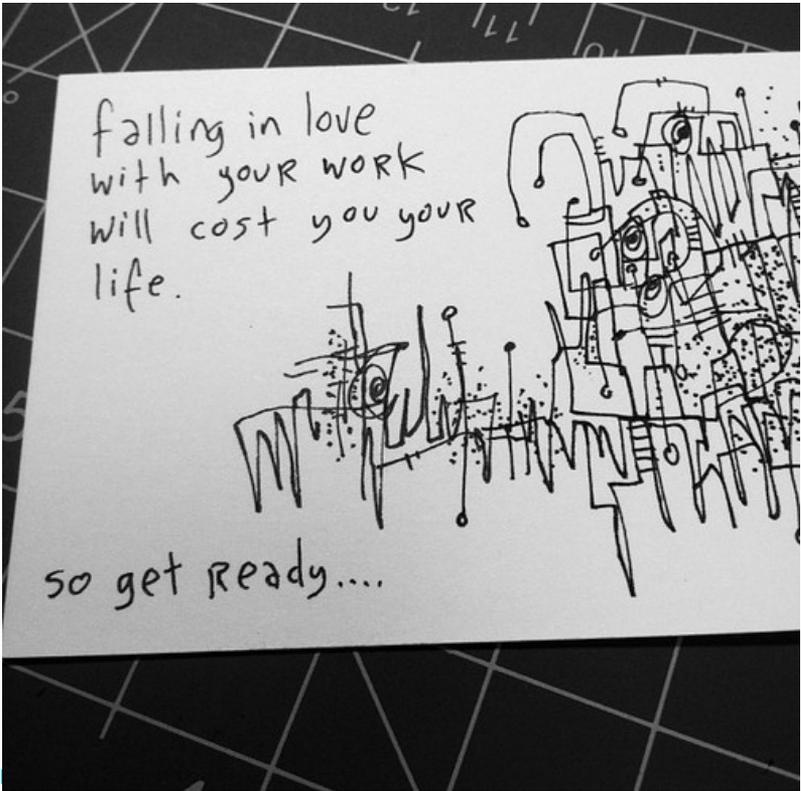
## 12. THERE IS NO SECRET SAUCE

*WORK HARD. LIVE QUIETLY. BE FRUGAL. SIMPLIFY. NEVER COMPLAIN. CONSTANTLY ELEVATE YOUR CRAFT.*

Sure, a bit of talent and good fortune comes in handy. It's nice that you could draw better than any other kid in your small town, or that your parents had the money to afford tennis lessons after class.

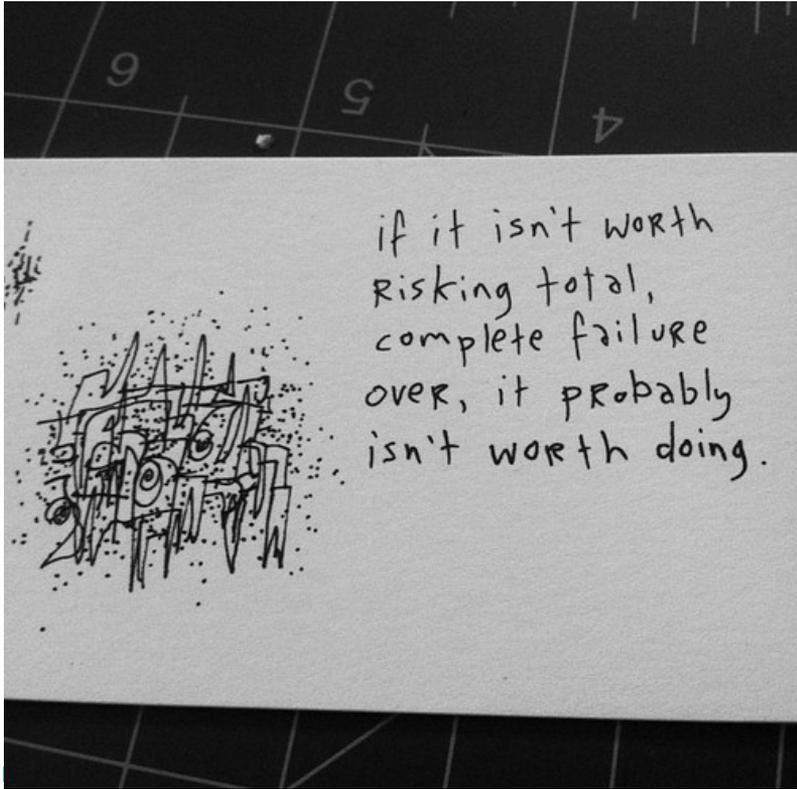
But that just gets you to the starting line. The actual race is what happens after that, day in, day out, for many years to come.

And the ones who win, the ones who really elevate their craft, are generally the ones who work the hardest. Life is unfair.



### *13. YOUR BRAIN IS A FILTER. USE IT WISELY.*

As my friend, [Austin Kleon](#) brilliantly pointed out, your work is a mash up of everything that you allow into your brain. If you fill your head with junk, you will produce more junk. Even if it's postmodern, ironic and hipsterish, it's still junk.



#### *14. MARKETING IS IMPORTANT*

It's too easy to easy to put marketing in the "Sleazy & Cheesy" box, it's too easy to just dismiss it because it isn't "My Art" or whatever, or that it's something only "the suits" do.

But the thing is, marketing does matter. Heck, if you're Seth Godin (one of my personal heroes), you can make the case that, in fact, marketing is one of our most important activities.

Why? Because the best idea, product, skill, service or cause (or whatever you decide to master) isn't much use, if nobody knows about it. This is true whether you're selling something pretty trivial or trying to save the world though some noble effort.

Seth defines marketing not so much in terms of sales and selling, but the art of getting ideas to spread.

“The ideas that win are the ideas that spread.” That’s probably Seth’s most lucid sentence ever, and he’s already got a ton of those.

Trivialize marketing at your peril.

[PS: To learn more about my philosophy on marketing, well, there’s always my books, but I would also recommend Seth Godin’s “Tribes”, Mark Earls’ “Herd” and The Cluetrain Manifesto. That’s enough to get you started.]

**PART THREE: MEANING**

15. *A SUCCESSFUL, MEANINGFUL LIFE MAKES A LOT OF "ART"*

For a lot people, "Successful" just means having a lot of stuff, of having a lot of worldly appetites indulged.

For a lot of people, "Successful" just means helping rich people get even richer, in exchange for a piece of the action.

And yet...

We all know there's more to life than that; that if all we care about is all that material, carnal, consumer crap, life would dry up and turn grey really quickly.

And we don't want that, we want to feel as alive as we possibly can.

We want a good life.

Deep inside our frail, little selves, we know that's true.

And the way to have a good life is to *do stuff that matters*. With people who matter. Day in, day out.

What some people call "Art".

Art is: The stuff you do that matters.

How do you know if the stuff you do is "Art" or not? You don't. Not at first. But you carry on, regardless. And maybe one day your equally frail and fragile hunch will pay off.

Because you know in your deepest self, that's the right thing to do.

Because it matters. And if it doesn't, God help you.



*16. BE NICE. KARMA IS MORE RUTHLESS THAN YOU ARE.*

What goes around comes around, so they say. What they don't tell you so much is, when it does come around eventually (as it must), it's had plenty of time to build up momentum, like a wave, so it comes at you even harder, good or bad. Compound Karma. Wave Karma. Exactly.

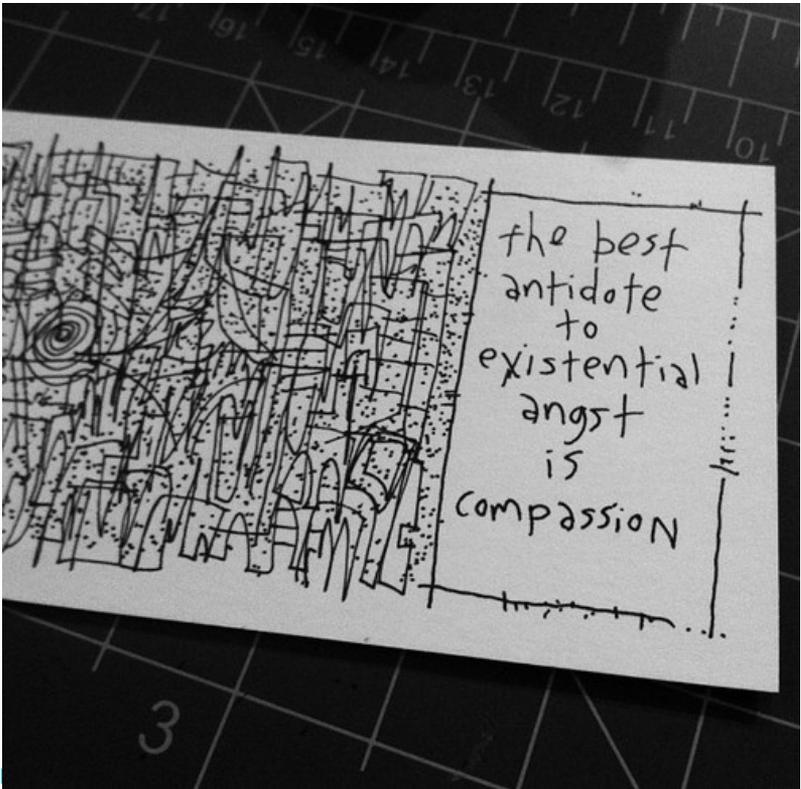
I like to live my life with the belief that karma last for eternity, that small events in the present will cause titanic events in the future, good or bad. Compound Karma. My own private Butterfly Effect. So I'm careful. And humble. I try to keep my head down.

Truly understanding that there's no way out of the karmic equation, that Karma does its thing with or without my permission, is actually quite liberating.

Because then you're not trying to outsmart it, not using up precious bandwidth trying to in vain to find a new angle, freeing you up to just get on with things in their proper order, not futzing around, looking for shortcuts.

You may not be able to control the universe, but you can control your actions within it.

That is the best kind of freedom there is, no?



### 17. YOU WILL DIE.

*“To study philosophy is to learn how to die.” –Cicero.*

*“Be happy while you’re living, for a you’re a long time dead.”  
–Scottish proverb.*

*“Life is short. Make it amazing.” –gapingvoid cartoon.*

The British author, John Mortimer once described Life as *“A tiny blip of time, separating two vast expanses of eternity”*.

Ain’t that the truth...

The insanely brilliant stoic philosopher and Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius famously coined the phrase, *“Live every day as if it were your last, for one day it will be.”*

The great mythologist, Joseph Campbell thought that religion came about once human beings first became aware of their own mortality.

I believe all these great thinkers were right on the money, in their own way.

Without death, life would have no meaning. *It is death that gives life its edge.*

And it’s that edge that gives life its meaning.

That gives us the experience of being alive.

Which is what the meaning of life is really all about.

To know life, is to know death. And maybe, just maybe, be OK with it.

Now go do good work, with all your heart. Yes.

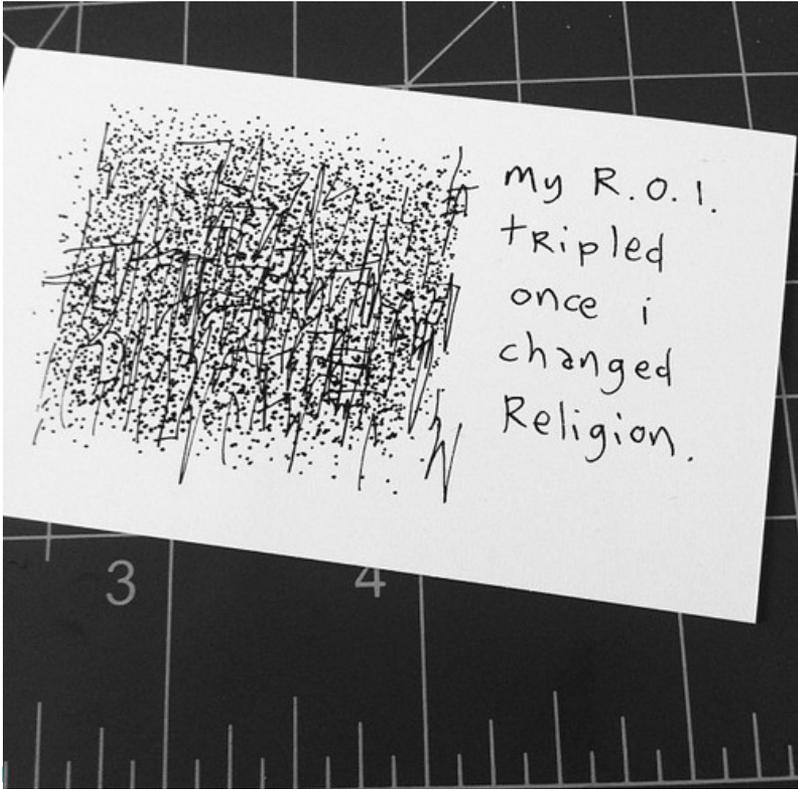


**18. LOVE IS THE ONLY THING THAT MATTERS, IN  
THE END.**

You lose everything eventually. Your looks, your career, your possessions, your libido, your health, your memories, your family and friends, your life. But as the poet, Philip Larkin once said, Love is the only thing that outlives us.

It's also the only thing that truly makes us happy.

“Without Love, I am nothing....” Saint Paul knew what he was talking about.



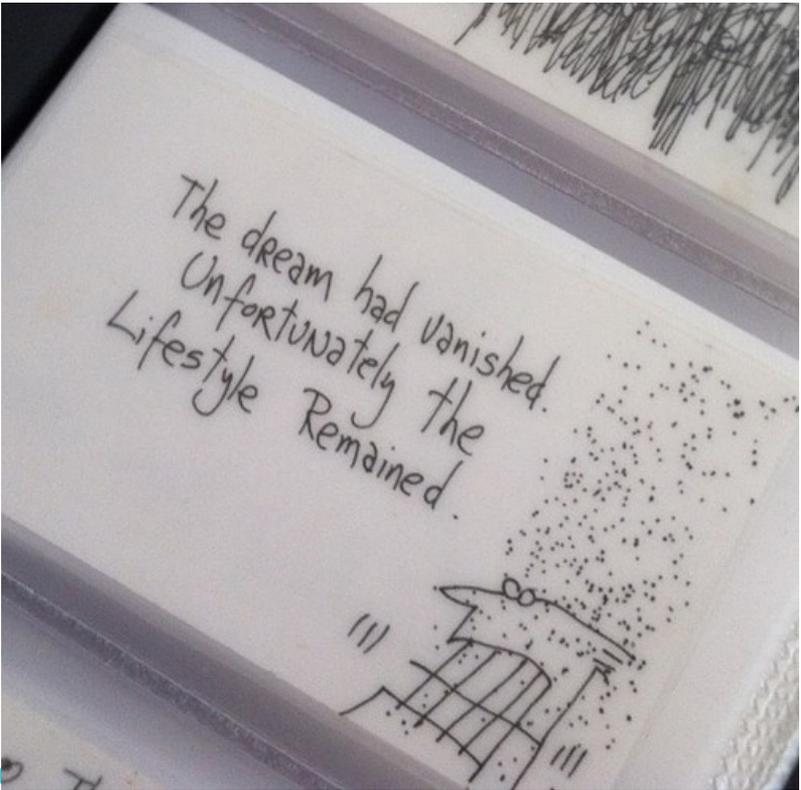
***19. ANYTHING WORTH DOING WILL COST YOU  
YOUR LIFE.***

By the time you've figured all this out, figured out how "not to suck", figured out how to master your calling, figured out the real meaning of it all, you'll most likely be old and close to death.

But that's OK.

That's what Life is for.

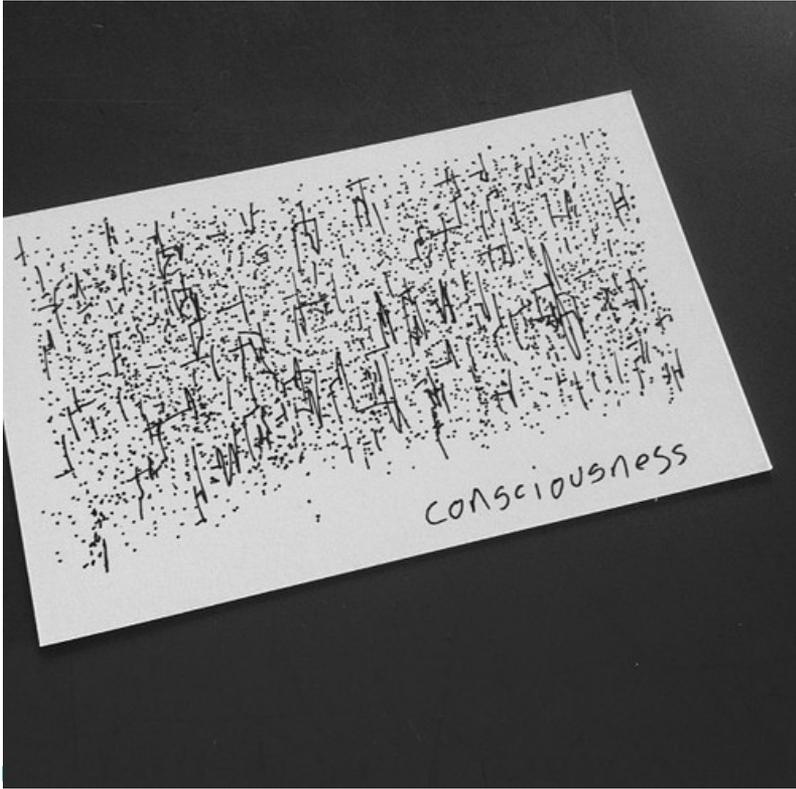
## PART FOUR: RANDOM ADVICE



*[Just some other stuff I picked up along the way etc.]*

*20. WE'RE ALL CONNECTED.*

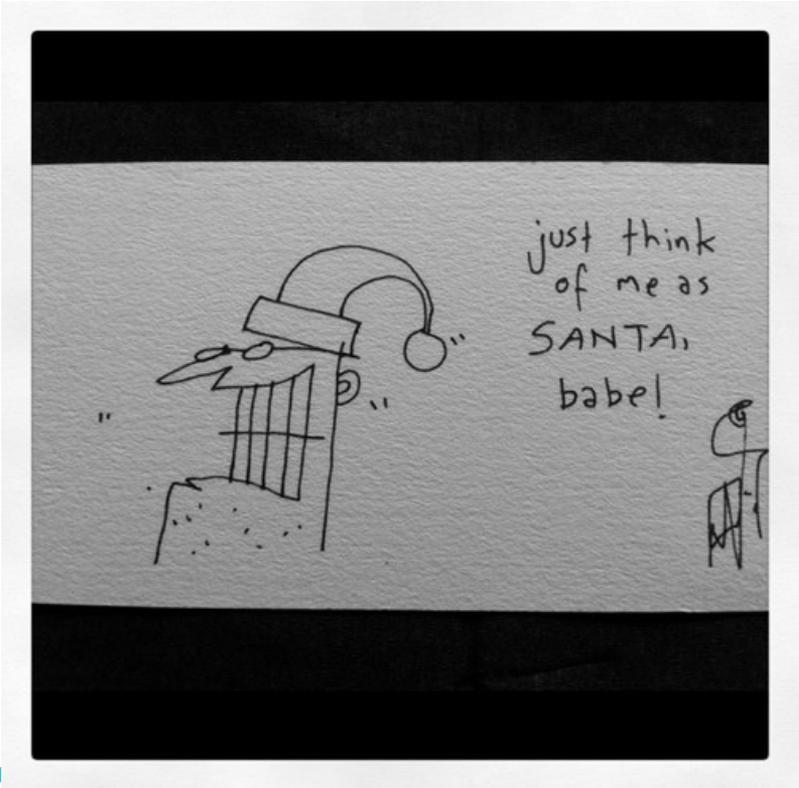
I know that's old news. We all know that, thanks to the Internet, everything is just one click away. But do we actually act like we know that; are we actually living it?



*21. THE OLD JOBS SIMPLY AREN'T THERE ANYMORE.*

And yet the schools still act like they are. That's partly the fault of the schools, sure, but it's also part the fault of the parents.

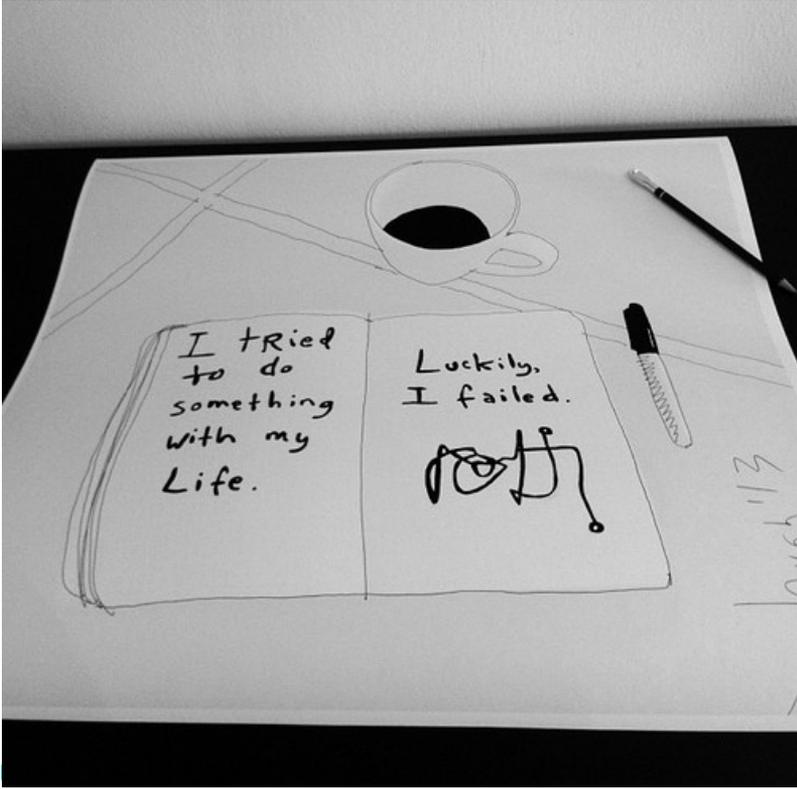
[Note: If you like what you see, please subscribe to [my daily cartoon newsletter](#), thanks.]



**22. IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO BE GOOD AT DOING THE WORK,  
YOU HAVE TO BE GOOD AT CREATING YOUR OWN  
PLATFORM.**

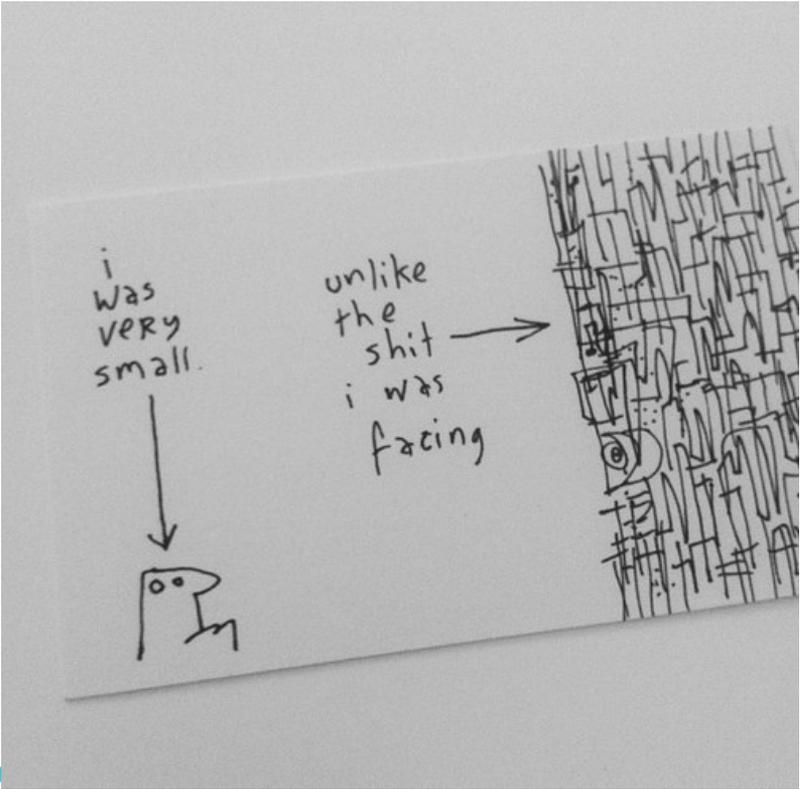
If you think of your job as just a paycheck, and not as a platform, you're doing something wrong.

If you think of your job as just a paycheck, and not as a platform, you will probably never be successful.



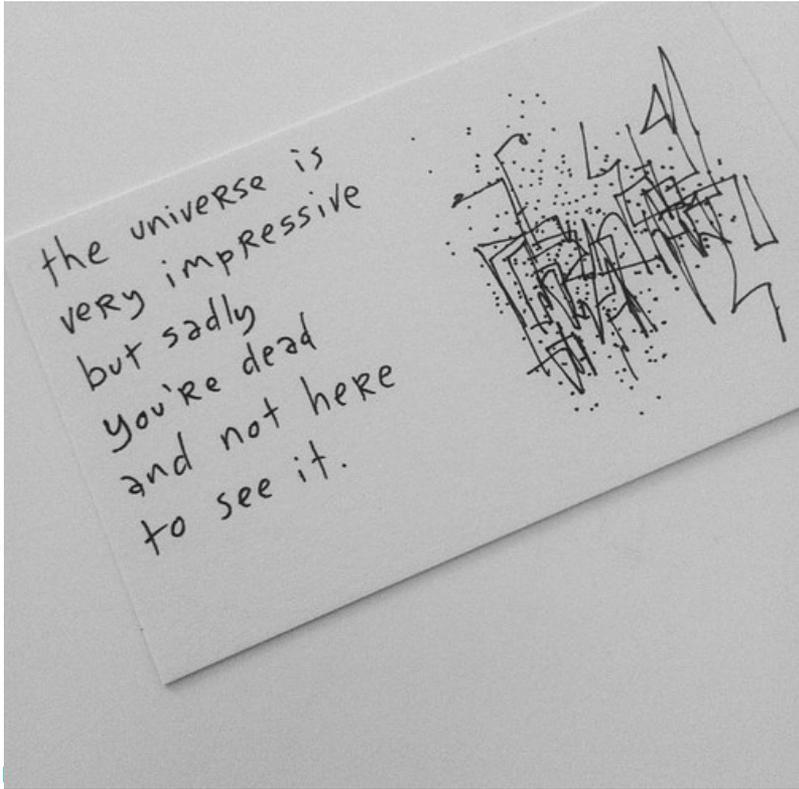
### 23. OWN SOMETHING.

When I was just starting out, looking for my first real job, I was just one more piece of paper in a tall stack of resumes. Though really, I didn't have to present myself that way, I just assumed that was the done thing, and that's what I did in the end. That was an expensive mistake.



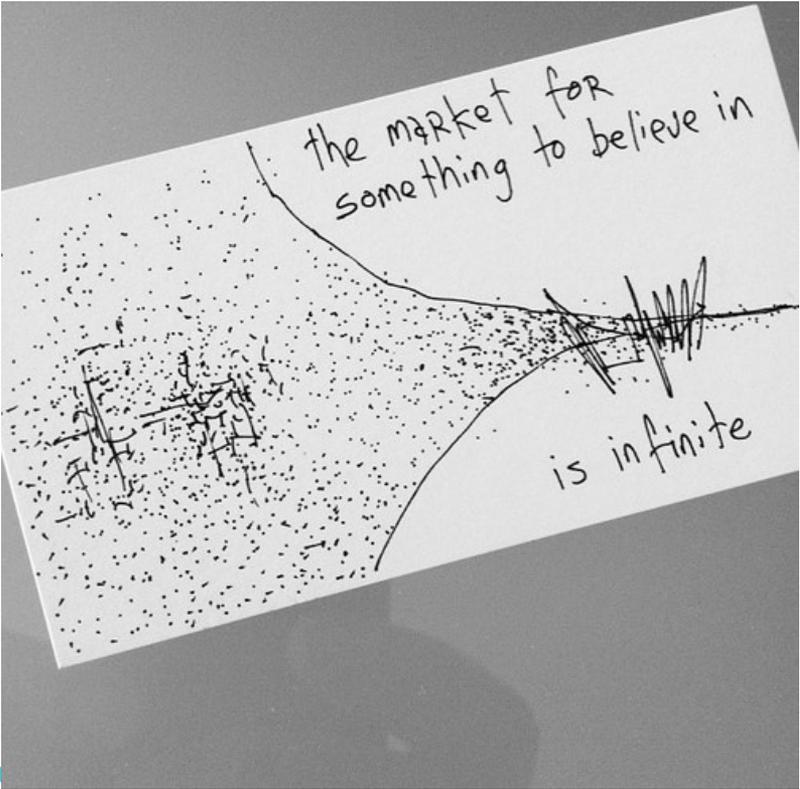
#### *24. EVERYBODY IS JUST AS SCARED AS YOU.*

Nobody knows the future, especially our current future. Google, Facebook, Washington, Wall Street, Hollywood, Madison Avenue... they're all as clueless as we are. The Internet changed everything. The rise of China, India and Brazil changed everything. And one day this future will be something we're thankful for.



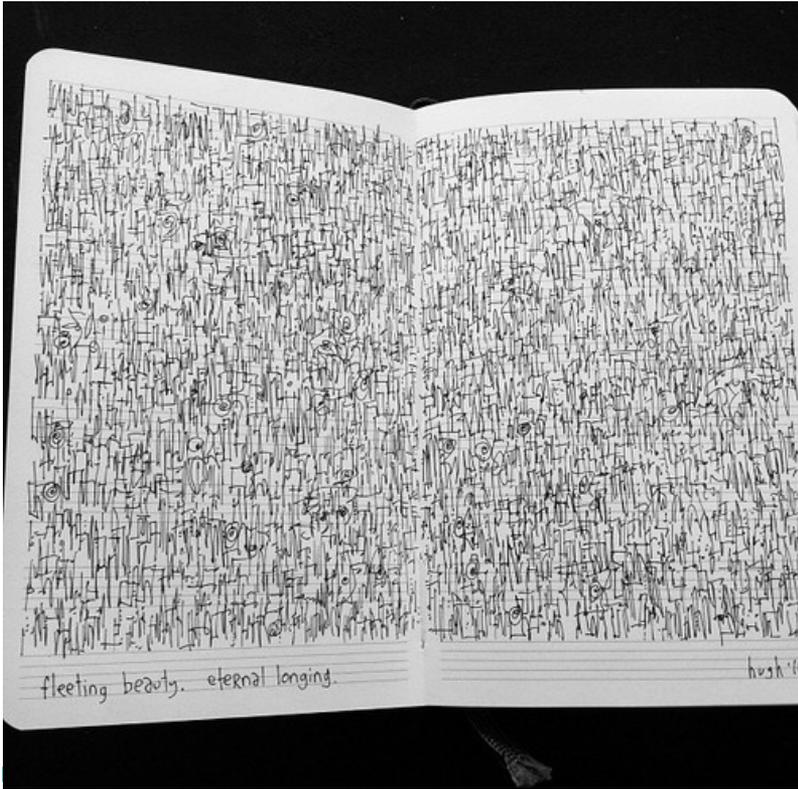
**25. HOW TO BE SUCCESSFUL: FIND OUT WHAT MATTERS, FIND OUT WHO MATTERS, THEN CARRY ON.**

It isn't rocket science. If you have something that you care about, chances are there are other people who also care about it. These people are easy to find, on the Internet. Try to find out what they're hungry for, and try to feed that hunger. It shouldn't be too hard, if you keep it simple.



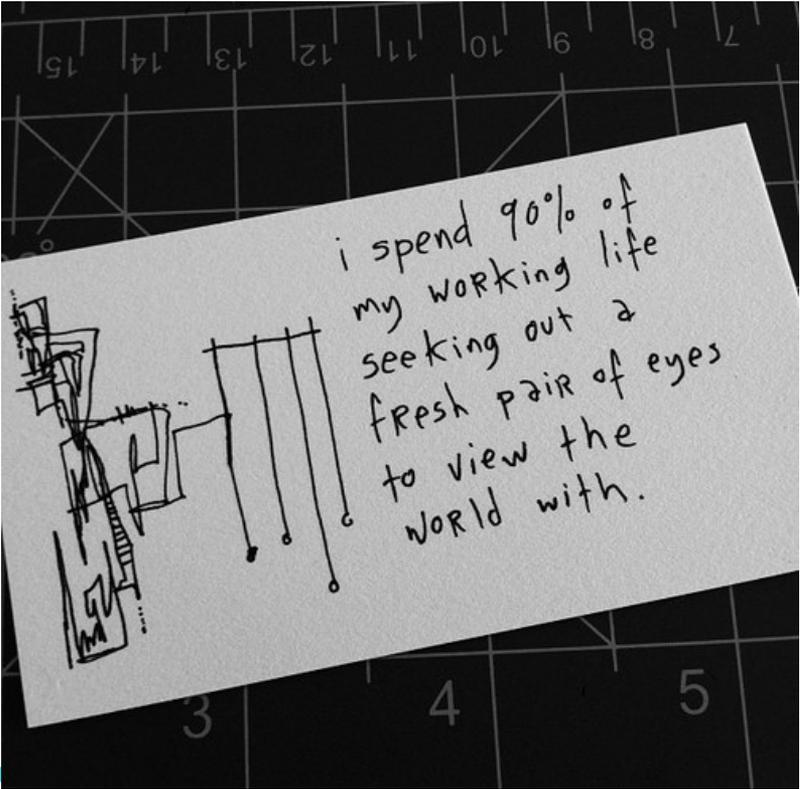
**26. IT'S EITHER A PLATFORM, OR IT'S SOMETHING THAT  
WILL EVENTUALLY DROWN YOU.**

I loved my first job, working in a bar. Sure, it was low paid and noisy and stressful and all that, but I didn't care. I was only eighteen years old, and even then I knew that this job was giving me something I would never get in school— access to adults. I saw it as something much bigger than a meager paycheck, I saw it as my platform into adulthood... which is was.



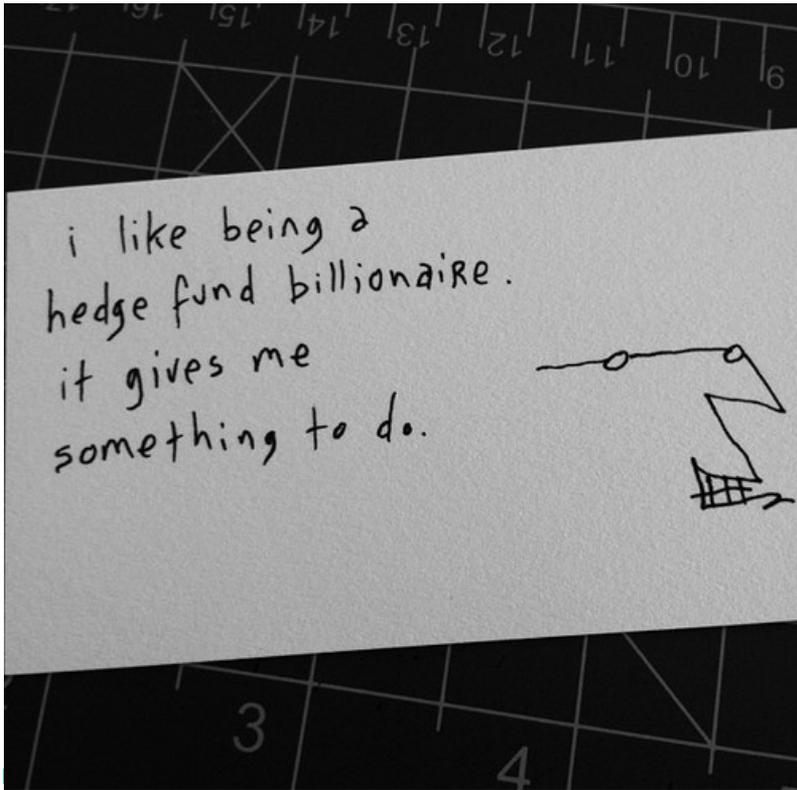
**27. HAVE ONE EYE LOOKING OUT, ONE EYE LOOKING IN.**

You have your inner life, you have your outer life. Art and religion, meets business and science, or whatever. Both need to be talking to each other in a constructive way, or your life will just end in failure.



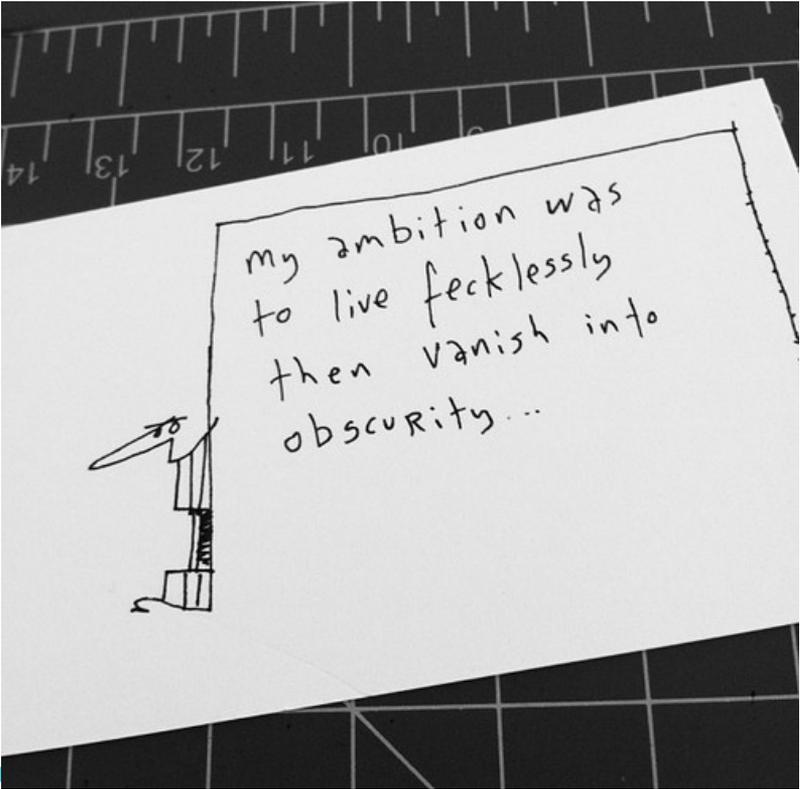
**28. BE NICE. BE HELPFUL. THE ALTERNATIVES WON'T  
MAKE YOU HAPPY.**

“Nice guys finish last” might work TEMPORARILY on Wall Street or in the court of Emperor Nero, but for 99.99% of humanity, we’re simply not made to act that way. We’re made to be nice to each other.



### *29. YOU WERE BORN TO BE HAPPY.*

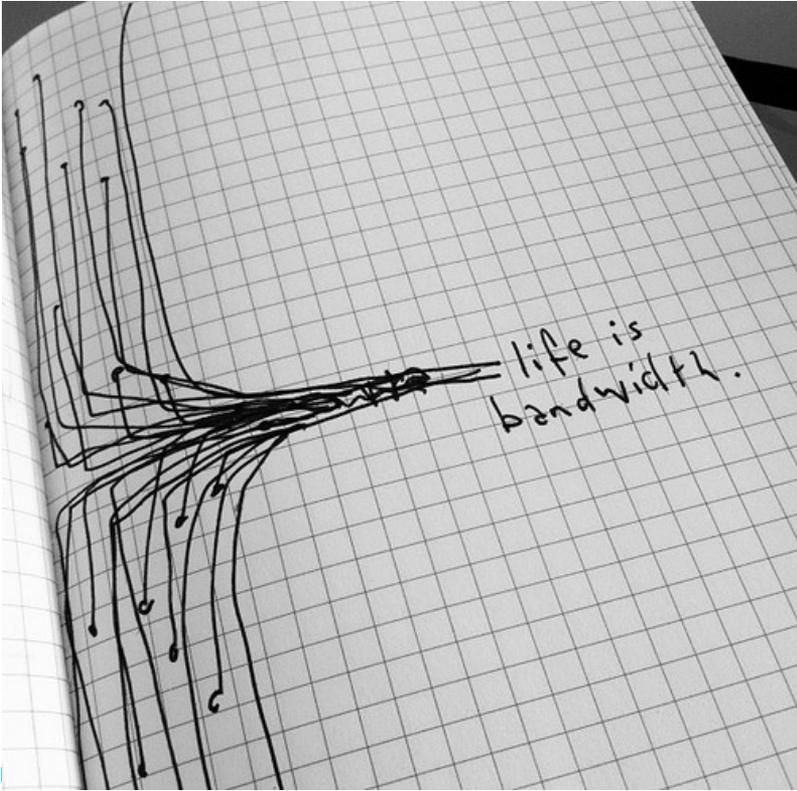
Unless something truly wrong is going on— war, plague, famine, pestilence etc— nature made us to enjoy our lives. So if you're not happy in spite of everything happening around you, it's probably because you're doing something wrong, and probably something to do with your relationships.



*30. FAIL LIKE A CHILD.*

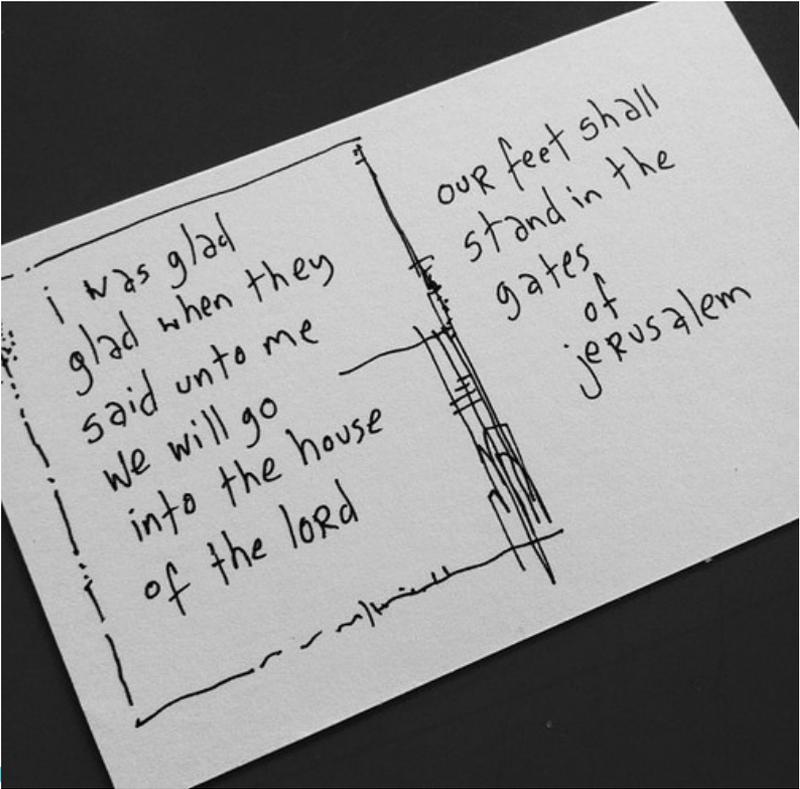
And keep on failing like a child. Until you die. Enough said.

[Note: If you like what you see, please subscribe to [my daily cartoon news-letter](#), thanks.]



*31. YOU MUST DISCOVER WHAT YOUR REAL JOY IS.*

Nobody discovers what their real joy is right away. It's an ongoing dialogue, even with super-talented people.



### 32. SMALL ART CAN BE JUST AS POWERFUL AS BIG ART.

Summer, 2011. A friend of mine was in Paris, where she went and checked out the massive Anish Kapoor sculpture, [Monumenta 2011](#), on exhibit at Le Grand Palais.

This got me thinking...

I like Kapoor's work. He makes very big art.

I, on the other hand, make very small art i.e. the ["cartoons drawn on the back of business cards"](#). And [the prints aren't too large](#), either.

Though I like a lot of “Big Art”- Kapoor, Serra, Gormley, Smithson etc etc- I’m pretty happy I stuck with “Small Art”.

Small Art can impact another person on a meaningful level, just as powerfully as Big Art. Fifteen lines from Shelley’s Ozymandias had as much impact on me as fifteen hundred pages of Tolstoy’s War & Peace did, as much as I loved the latter.

And Small Art is A LOT less hassle to make.

And you can make more of it. More often. Without bankrupting yourself or putting your life on hold for months on end.

And perhaps more importantly, there’s the “Personal Sovereignty” angle. With Small Art, there’s no need to wait for someone else to deem it worthy beforehand, no need to wait nervously for the rich patron, the movie studio exec, or the illustrious museum director to give it the greenlight. There’s no need for the politics or the schmoozing or the bureaucracy.

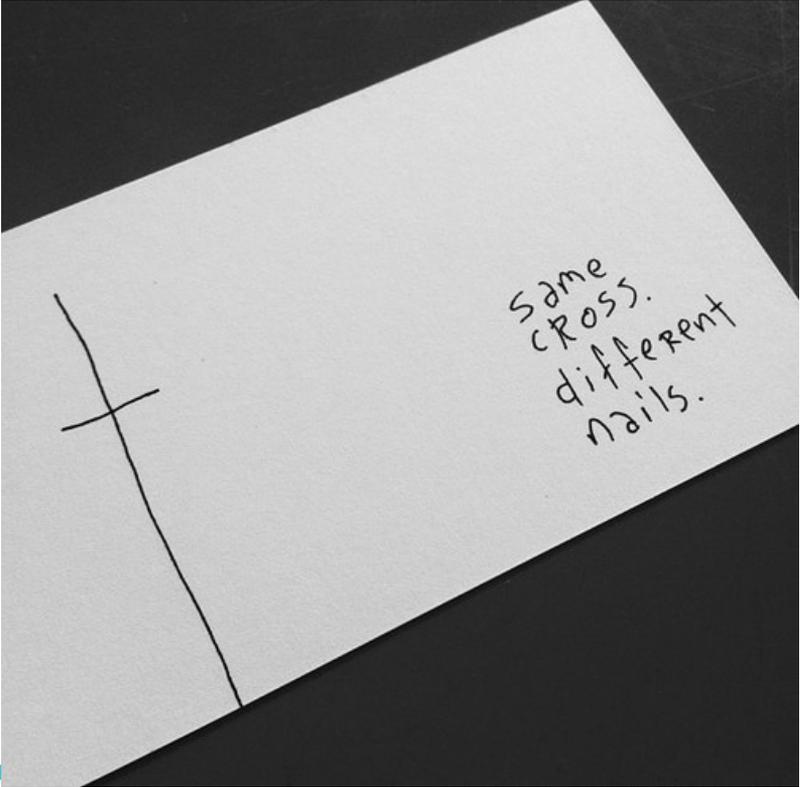
Or the sleaze and corruption. The Big Art world is rife with that, as we all know full well.

With Small Art, you just go ahead and make it, and then it exists, and the rest is in the hands of the gods. Your work is already done, and you can get to bed at a decent hour. And not lose any sleep over it, either.

Hey, it worked for Joseph Cornell, Saul Steinberg and Edward Gorey... three artists who I rate WAY higher than Kapoor or Serra.

And what is true for Art is probably true for your thing, as well. Worry less about how BIG you want your business to be, instead think about how much LOVE you actually want to give out while you still have time left on this earth. “Meaning Scales”.

Exactly...



### 33. MAKE EVERY WORK OF ART LIKE IT'S YOUR LAST.

Another riff on Marcus Aurelius' *"Live each day as if it were your last, for one day it will be."*

In Robert Altman's 1992 movie, "The Player", David Kahane, an unsuccessful screenwriter is randomly murdered. At his funeral, his friend Phil reads out the last words he ever wrote:

Blackness.

A mangy dog barks.

Garbage can lids are lifted as derelicts in the street... hunt for food.

Buzzing, as a cheap alarm clock goes off.

Interior. Flophouse room.

Early morning.

A tracking shot moves through the grimy room.

Light streams in through holes in yellowing window shades.

Moths dance in the beams of light.

Track down along the floor.

The frayed rug.

Stop on an old shoe. It's empty.

That's as far as he got, said Phil...

If David Kahane knew these words were going to be the last ones he would ever write, do you think he would've have chosen them? No, of course not, he would've written something else, something far more meaningful and timeless.

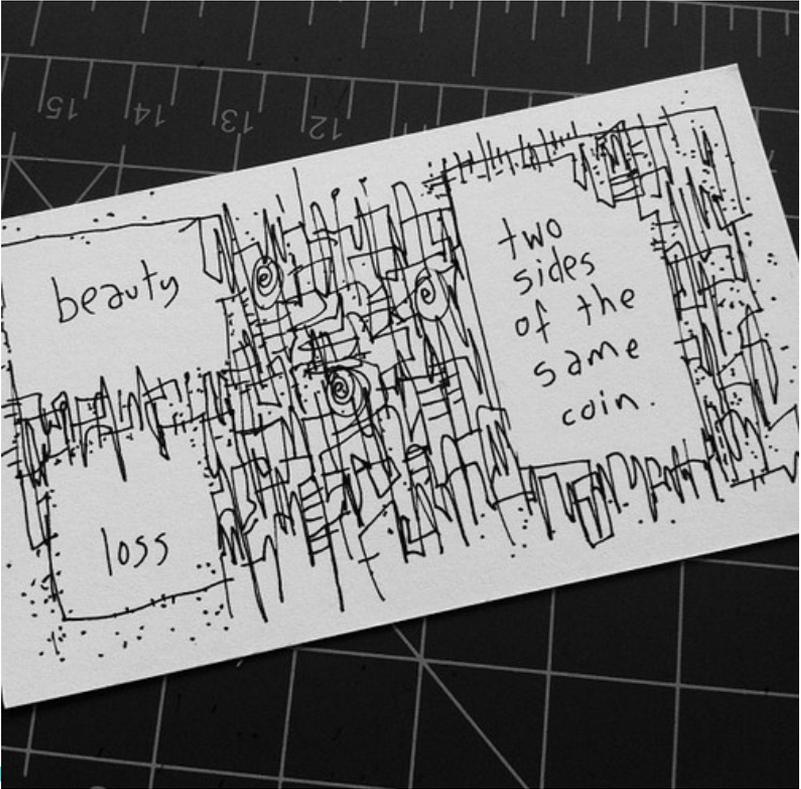
The fleeting inconsequentiality of Kahane's last words is what makes the scene so memorable, so tragic. As a storyteller trying to make a point, Robert Altman knew what he was doing.

That scene always stuck with me. It told me, "Make every word you write count, Boy, for one day those words will be your last".

The fact that I was watching the movie for the first time in a crowded cinema in West LA, made it seem even more tragi-comic than usual. A lot of other un-dead David-Kahane-types were in the audience, all laughing nervously at the in-joke.

It's too easy to just laugh at all the in-jokes, isn't it? It's too easy to think one is immune, isn't it?

Too easy to be inconsequential...



**34. "MY WORK DOESN'T BELONG IN GALLERIES, IT BELONGS IN THE OFFICE..."**

I get asked all the time: "Why don't you show in art galleries?"

And I always answer the same: "Because my work doesn't belong in art galleries, it belongs in office cubicles."

Even if you go back to the 1990's, back when I was starting out, it was the same story. I always liked making art SPECIFICALLY for

the workplace. I always liked making work that pushed that aspect of human existence further in the right direction.

After family, the time you spend in your place of work is the most important arena of your existence. That is where you go to find out, over time, who your true self really is.

And your true self needs art around it, your true self needs constant reminding that your true self **ACTUALLY** exists.

Your true self needs **TOTEMS** around that **INSPIRE** it on a daily basis.

That's what I hope the cartoons help articulate, help bring to the surface. Unlike most of the knucklehead art you see around the gallery scene...

Besides, it's a niche most other artists don't really think about- they're too busy trying to conquer other worlds. Which is fine, even if those other worlds are already too crowded; already **SATURATED** with the froth of other knuckleheads.

"My work doesn't belong in art galleries, it belongs in office cubicles."

It's not a bad life, I suppose...



### 35. "ONLY CONNECT."

As artists and/or marketers and/or business people, it's not enough to just think about the money and the ROI. We need to know that we "connected", somehow. Deeply so, sometimes.

Or else we just become very dull, making very dull stuff for very dull people, living very dull lives.

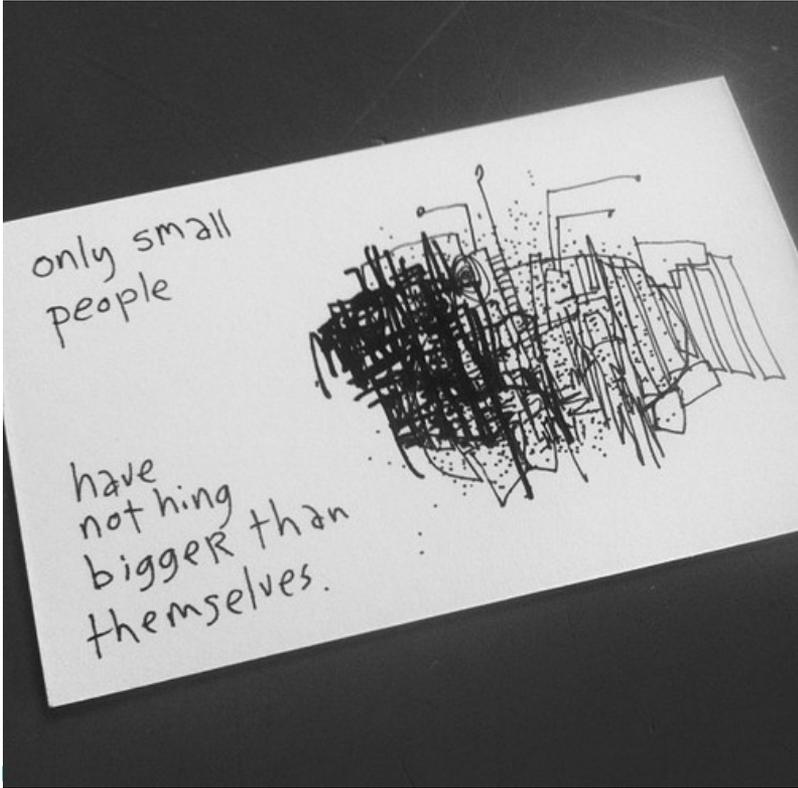
Which except for the occasional faceless corporation, is not much of a sustainable business model.

E.M. Forster's very famous advice to aspiring authors had a mere two words: "Only connect."

Exactly. In both art and business.

*Only connect.*

Think about it.



**36. YOU CAN'T PLAN FOR CREATIVITY. YOU CAN ONLY PLAN TO DO THE WORK.**

Kids come up to me and ask me all the time...

Kid: How do I get a "creative" career-thing going like yours?

Hugh: Make something. Grab a piece of paper and a pen or whatever and get cracking...

Kid: What if it isn't any good?

Hugh: Then you're screwed.

Kid: Ok, what if it's pretty good, but it's still going to take me another twenty or thirty years before the world understands it?

Hugh: Then you're slightly less screwed.

At that point, they're already sick of asking me any more questions and so they move on, unhappy. Oh well...

The thing is, people think there's some set of ideal conditions out there, floating independently in space, that somehow have to be met, some magic fairy boxes that need to be ticked off, before you can go and "be creative", whatever that means.

"I've got to quit my job, leave my wife, move to India and become an opium addict yada yada yada..." "I've got to drop out of college, move to New York and carry on a forbidden and tumultuous lesbian affair with a Japanese novelist twice my age yada yada yada..."

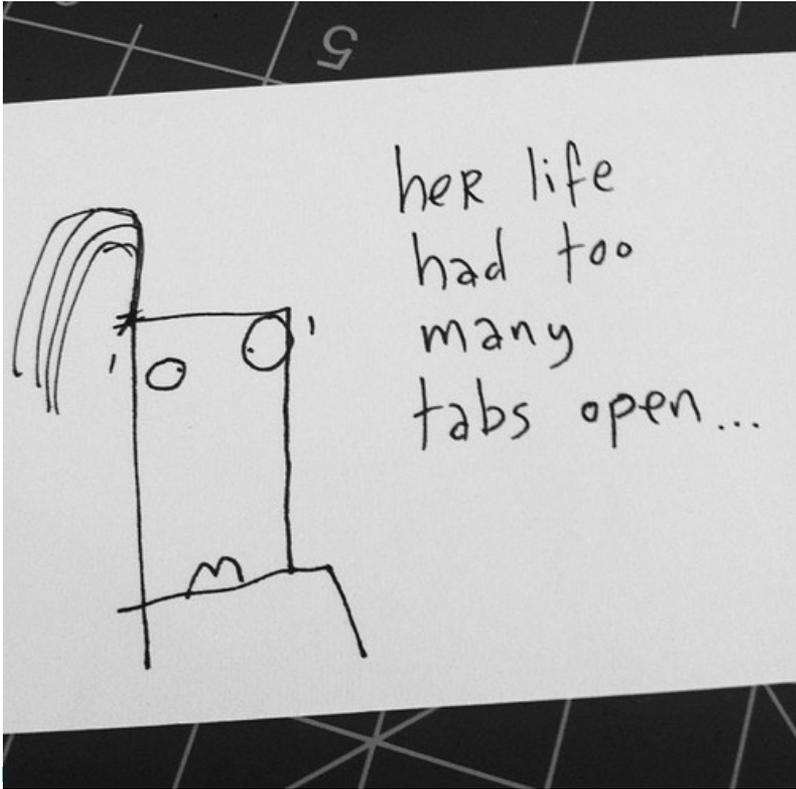
Actually, no. The way to be creative is to make stuff. You wake up in the morning, have some breakfast, hit the work bench and get on it with it.

Or not. Maybe you'd rather just hang out, light a joint and watch Star Trek reruns. Your call.

Whether it ends up being "creative" or not, is decided later. Long after you've finished the thing and moved on to something else.

That's what I mean by it coming "after the fact."

And so there we are.



### *37. THE ERA OF CAREER-ON-AUTOPILOT IS OVER.*

Hardly a morning goes by these days without me hearing some story on [NPR Morning Edition](#) about American economic woe. People who've been working hard all their lives, suddenly can't afford presents for their kids. Those kind of stories. They're sad as hell, and they seem to be getting more and more frequent.

At the same time I keep seeing news stories [like this one from the WSJ](#), Christmas 2011: About how competition in Silicon Valley for engineering talent is so fierce, they're fighting over interns now:

Silicon Valley's talent wars are going younger.

Bay Area tech companies, already in a fierce fight for full-time hires, are now also battling to woo summer interns. Technology giants like Google Inc. have been expanding their summer-intern programs, while smaller tech companies are ramping up theirs in response? — sometimes even luring candidates away from college.

And then there was [another 2011 story from the BBC](#), about how Brazil has now overtaken the UK as the world's sixth largest economy.

A lot of the world is in flux, so it seems. And to this cartoonist, it has a simple enough explanation:

[The Great Convergence is upon us](#), and our friend, the Internet is accelerating the process. This would be happening with or without "The 1%" misbehaving themselves— whatever the mainstream media and [the Occupy Wall Street crowd](#) might say.

*The good news is, if you have a talent, the world wants it, and it has never been so easy to show your talent to the world.*

*The bad news is, especially for us fat & lazy Americans, is that the great, century-long era of Prosperity-on-Autopilot is over.*

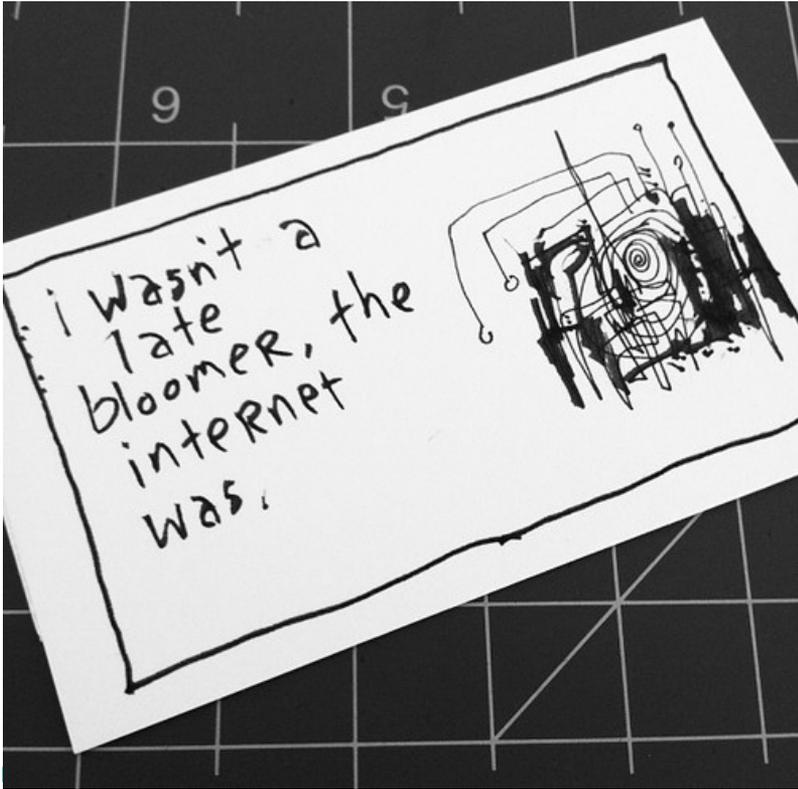
The world still wants serious talent. And it still wants people doing the grunt work: pushing mops, digging ditches, waiting tables, answering phones, flipping burgers etc..

It's the people in the middle that nobody knows what to do with anymore. And the politicians who claim that they do, **are lying**.

It's probably too late for my generation, that ship has already sailed. But for the kids out there reading this, who are just starting out?

Learn how to work hard, work long hours. Find something you love, and then excel at it. Above all else, learn how to create, learn how to invent. That's your only hope, really.

Like I said, no more Autopilot.



*38. FIND THE HOLY IN EVERYDAY ACTIVITY.*

My friend, [Euan Semple](#) is probably the guy who convinced me to switch from PC to Apple, about five years ago.

“Even opening up the cardboard box is a religious experience!”, he said.

Heh. A slight exaggeration, certainly.

But then I’m thinking... Perhaps not?

As somebody who likes to study religion, I’ve always thought that one of the more interesting questions in the world to ponder is, “What is Holy?”

Exactly. Holy. What does it actually mean?

And the same with Unholy...

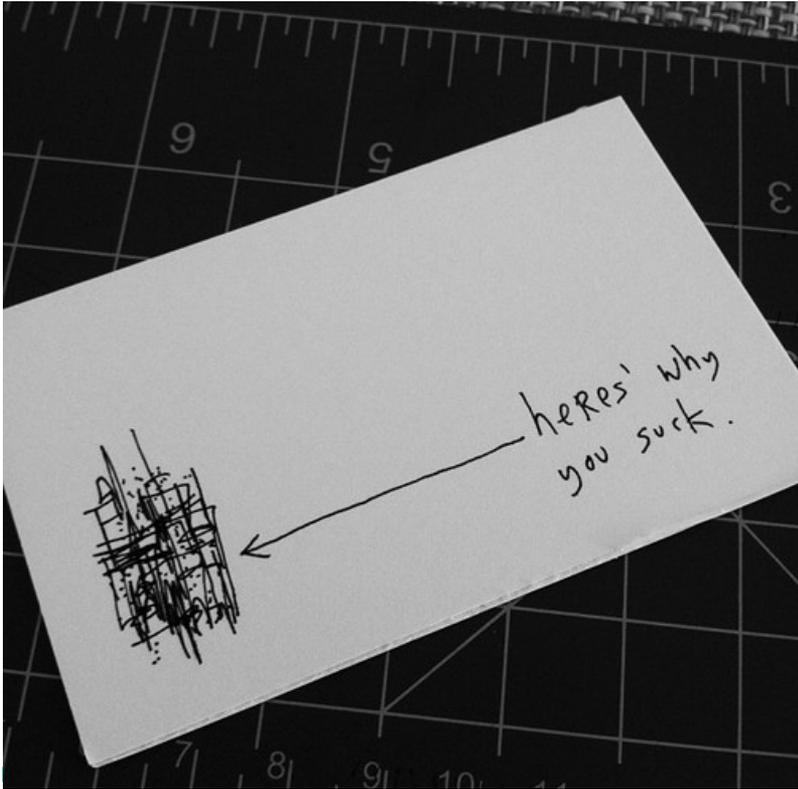
When a mundane act (such as the opening of a cardboard box) is elevated (in this case, by great package design), we experience what the mystics call “The Divine”.

This doesn’t have to mean a strong belief in God, either way. They’re called mystics for a reason: the whole thing is indeed a mystery. Call it “God” if you will, call it something else completely. The mystery remains, either way.

Work, whether business or craft or just plain hard, sweaty labor, is far more interesting, fun and meaningful when one can channel one’s own sense of divinity into it, religious or otherwise. This is how we find the Holy in everyday life, religious or otherwise.

This is how we plug into “The Mystery”.

Steve Jobs knew this, instinctively. It was glaringly obvious.



**39. "CULTURE HACKING" IS THE NEXT TRILLION-DOLLAR INDUSTRY.**

SO WHAT COMES AFTER ADVERTISING? The Golden Age of advertising— the “Mad Men” era— started about 50 years ago, with people like David Ogilvy, George Lois, Bill Bernbach leading the way, and shops like Weiden & Kennedy, BBH, Fallon, BMP, GGT, CDP and Goodby following in their wake.

This golden age came to an abrupt end, when our friend the Internet came along, with a lot of people on Madison Avenue suddenly starting to fear for their jobs.

So if traditional advertising is “dead”, what comes after it? That’s a question I’ve been asking myself for the last ten years, ever since I launched gapingvoid back in 2001.

Though I wasn’t paying too much attention at the time, the answer kinda-sorta came to me back in 2004, in a line I wrote in [The Hugh-train](#):

The hardest part of a CEO’s job is sharing his enthusiasm with his colleagues, especially when a lot of them are making one-fiftieth of what he is. Selling the company to the general public is a piece of cake compared to selling it to the actual people who work for it. The future of advertising is internal.

You can call it “Internal Advertising” if you want; I find that a bit old-school, frankly. I prefer the term “CULTURAL HACKING”- changing your company’s fortunes NOT by trying to directly change what the general public thinks of you, but by trying to change what YOU think of you.

Improving the company by improving the culture, by subverting the culture via counterintuitive means. Exactly.

And yes, Culture Hacking also drives the [Occupy Wall Street](#) movement and [AdBusters](#). Same idea, different aims (And if you read Greil Marcus’ [“Lipstick Traces”](#), you’ll learn that the same riff goes back to punk rock, 1950s French Marxism, early 20th-Century Dadaism, even back to the Middle Ages...].

The new business model will be the intersection of the three following things: Purpose, Company Culture and Media.

i. Purpose: It’s the “Why” of what you do, it is not the product, it is the [Purpose-Idea](#), as expressed by [Mark Earls](#), or “The Why” as expressed by [Simon Sinek](#).

ii. Company Culture is informed by “Purpose”, it is that actions that a business takes each and every day to remind people of their purpose. Purpose is a set of beliefs, and Culture is the expression of those beliefs in business (Action).

iii. Media: Advertising, PR, earned media, paid media, call it what you will. Once you have a “Purpose” and a company “Culture”, those two things inform all of your advertising, PR, communication, social interaction and points of contact with the outside world. From your logo, to your ads, Social Media, How your planes and trucks are painted, etc. It all informs, reinforces and feeds each other.

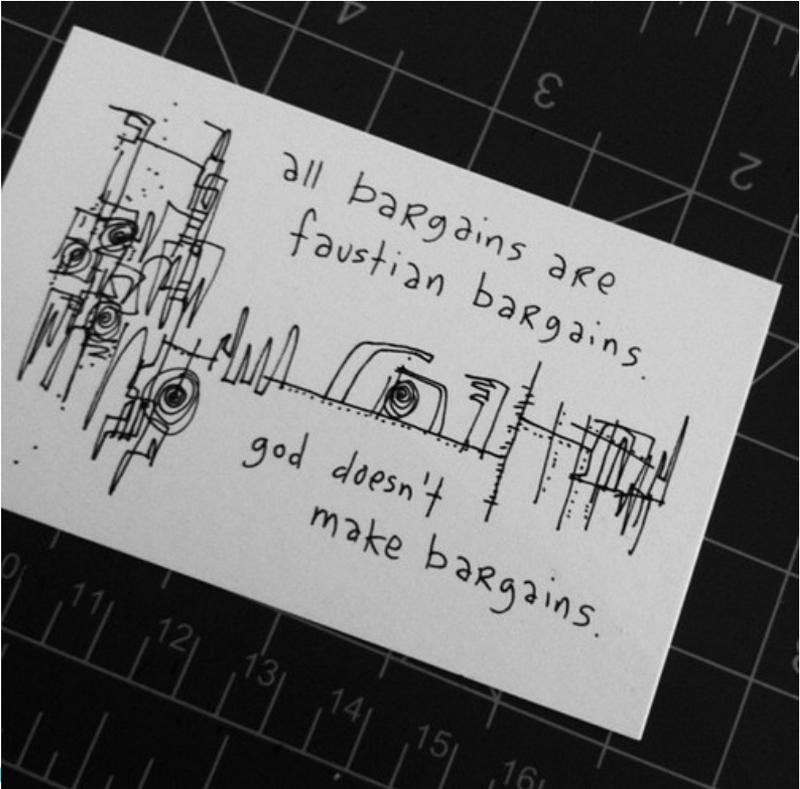
Culture Hacking is why “~~Delivering Happiness~~” became an international best seller. Culture Hacking is why people flock to Nevada in droves to take ~~the Zappos tour~~. Culture Hacking is why people will one day pay Jenn Lim and Tony Hsieh millions of dollars for the services of the “~~Delivering Happiness~~” company.

This is also why ~~Rackspace~~, Intel, Hewlett Packard and ~~Babson College~~ hired us (~~gapingvoid~~) to draw cartoons for them. This is why we produce ~~Cube Grenades~~. This is why big PR firms like Weber Shandwick or Edelman, if they get it right, will steal millions of dollars’ worth of business AWAY from traditional Madison Avenue agencies.

Culture Hacking is all about creating ~~social objects~~. Exactly.

[One more time:] Stop wasting your life in the traditional advertising-era quicksand. There’s a new game in town. Culture Hacking is a multi-billion dollar industry, still in its infancy. Get in early if you can...

[Note: If you like what you see, please subscribe to [my daily cartoon newsletter](#), thanks.]



#### 40. NEVER GO MAINSTREAM

Back when I was a kid and aspiring to one day earn the title “professional cartoonist”, I had this dreadful fear hanging over my head:

That the only way to become successful as a cartoonist, was to go mainstream. Cute and cuddly, warm and fuzzy. In the world of the big money cartooning, there was little room for “Edge”.

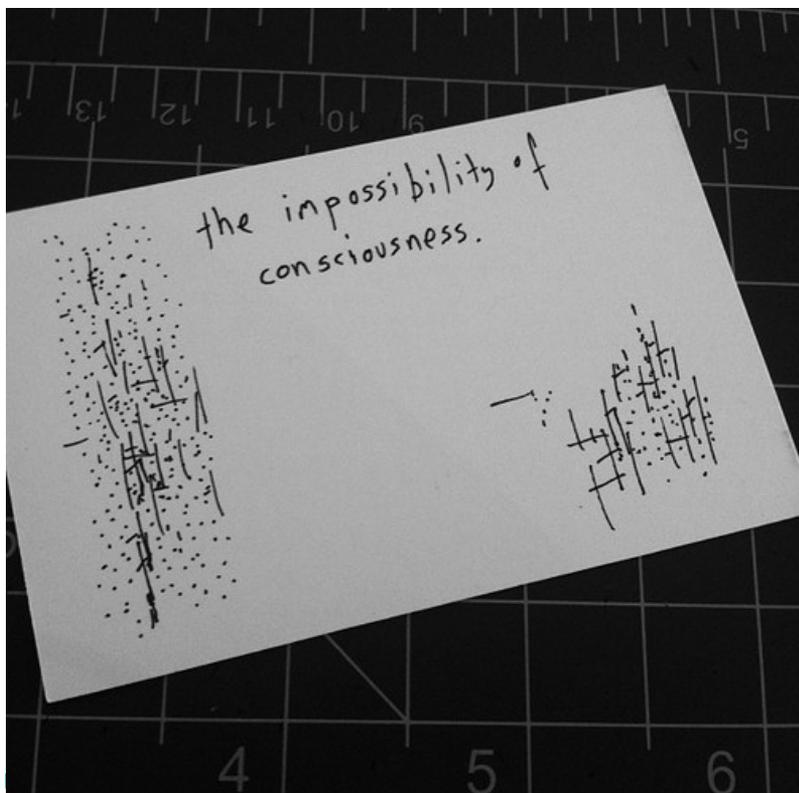
Check out the traditional US Sunday comics section of any newspaper, and you’ll see what I mean. Utter, cutey-pie drack.

I just couldn't see myself doing it. My stuff was just too "out there", and when I tried to reign it in, it just made it worse.

Of course, that was before the Internet came along and changed everything...

Anybody who courts the mainstream deserves everything they get. There's far more action in niches.

*[Further Reading: [The Cluetrain Manifesto](#), [Delivering Happiness](#), [Creative Age](#), [Tribes](#), [The Hughtrain](#) and [Lipstick Traces](#). All must-reads to better understand this brave new world of ours. Plus my friends at [Laughing Squid](#) and [PSFK](#) always seem to have their fingers on the pulse...]*



#### 41. PEOPLE MUST TREASURE YOU.

Not too far down the road from my house in Far West Texas, my friend, Glenn Short and his team make, and I kid you not, the best store-bought beef jerky I have ever tasted (And I have tasted A LOT over the years). ~~The Lights Jerky Company~~ is phenomenal, check it out.

After a few years struggling to get it off the ground, business is booming. I met one of his people last night, drinking beer over at The Railroad Blues. He was just EXHAUSTED at the end of the day from busting his ass, filling orders. It was, how you say, the right kind of exhaustion to have...

Out here in the Texas desert mountains, where it's ALWAYS been a tough place to make a living, I've noticed three kinds of business:

1. THE LOST CAUSES. New ones open and close all the time. Well meaning people who don't really get what they're doing, don't really get what their customers are after, don't really get much, in spite of their often valiant and kind-hearted efforts. Retired school teachers from Dallas, who never run a business before, who just moved out here recently because they liked the scenery, who SUDDENLY decided to go into the restaurant business or whatever. These places usually close down in less than nine months. They're not uncommon.
2. THE COMMODITIES. Stuff you'd expect to see out here. Gas stations. Convenience stores. Fast food joints. Nothing too special, but they provide some needed service, same as any where else. Nice local people working there and all, but nothing to write home about.
3. THE TREASURED. These are the rarest birds. Products that are not only INSANELY GREAT, but are done with such, imagination, love, flair, or even just plain ol' hard work and good manners, failure JUST isn't an option.

And treasured they are. If you live out here long enough, you start to realize soon enough that if you don't ACTUALLY TREASURE the businesses you love, I mean REALLY treasure them more than you

would in a big city, say, these places will just close down eventually, just blow out of town like tumbleweeds. Their unique magic will be gone, forever, without nothing to take their place.

And people KNOW that.

Lights Jerky is one of these. So is The Pizza Foundation, [The Marfa Book Company](#), Harry's Bar, [The Murphy Street Raspa Compaany](#), Novak's Barber Shop, [Tacos Del Norte](#), [The French Grocer](#) and [The Saddle Club](#), just to name a few.

And yes, these businesses are [Social Objects](#). When something happens in one of these places— somebody loses their job, or somebody gets sick etc— news travels WAY faster around town than with the other places. Because people ACTUALLY do care. BECAUSE they are treasured, the social dynamic is far more intense than in say, a national fast food chain.

And what is true in small-town West Texas is true in any big city. You don't have to be Amazon or Apple or IBM or McDonalds to be a social object. You can be a small jerky company, bookshop or taco stand. As I've always said, ["Meaning scales"](#).

But The Treasure Factor HAS to be there, somehow.

Is your business treasured? Or do people just give you money? Serious question...



#### *42. BLOGS ARE LIKE HAMMERS.*

Blogs are like hammers. They are tools for building stuff.

When you talk about building a house with a carpenter, you don't mind him talking about his hammer for a while.

Nobody minds indulging a craftsman, within reason.

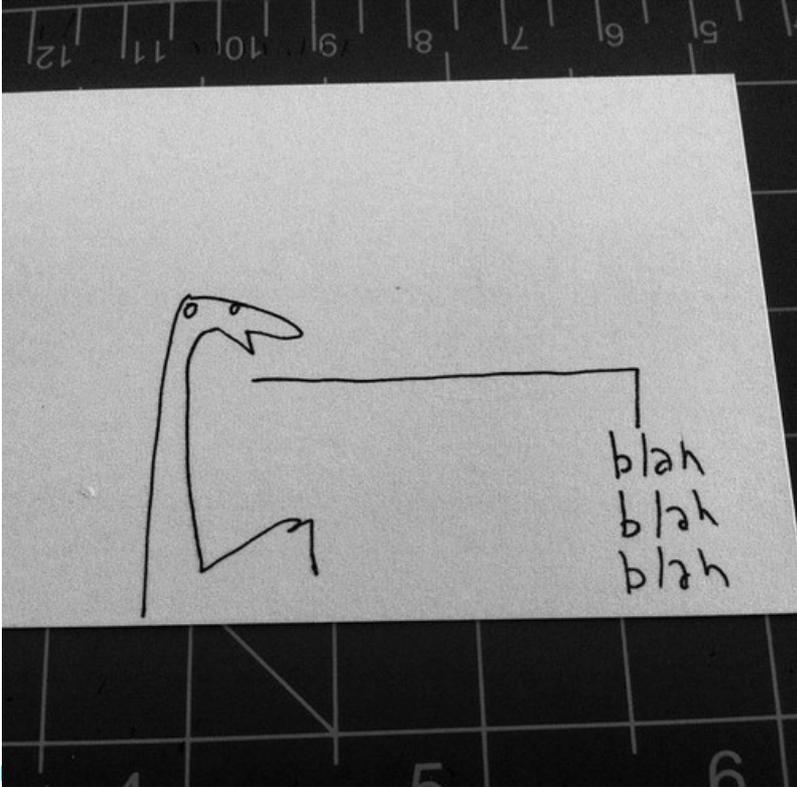
"This hammer is great for this," he'll gush. "This hammer is great for that..."

So you think yes, hammers are good things, and indeed his hammer looks like a particularly fine example.

But eventually you're going to interrupt his joyous ode to hammers. After a couple of minutes you're going to abruptly change the subject:

“Cool. Now let's talk about the ACTUAL HOUSE you're going to build for me...”

And if the carpenter is any good, he won't have any problem with that.



*43. BEWARE OF GURU-NOMICS.*

It's not a bag gig, I suppose...

You have a successful blog, read by lots of people, where you dole out lots of advice on how to create a successful blog, read by lots of people. And you rake in the cash doing so.

i.e. You're a "Guru".

I've been there myself. I've shared TONS of my tricks of the trade over the years, which has indirectly helped my bottom line no end... And I have to say, it's a good feeling to think you're actually helping people in real and meaningful ways.

Sure, compared to how most people have to pay their bills, being a "guru" is not a bad gig, not a bad gig at all. And there's some good ones out there, doing a splendid job helping people move their lives forward. No wonder why so many other people are also chasing after the very same gig, themselves.

But guru-dom has never sat well with me, somehow, no matter how good it was for business. And for the longest time I couldn't quite put my finger on it why that was.

Then recently I got talking to an old friend, somebody who spent a lot of time practicing as an Eastern mystic, who studied under REAL gurus and knew all about gurudom. The closest thing to a real Holy Man that I ever had the privilege of calling a friend.

Then one day he just gave it up completely. Just totally stopped. As he explained in his email:

I found enlightenment to be overrated. It turns out that when this comes about, all of the Karma in your life comes due at once... both good and bad. I've had to pay the sufi master three times to get out of town and leave me alone.

Many groups, end up in a sycophantic embrace and I found that to be distasteful, be careful. Since we live so many lives, There is plenty of time for this state to take effect. I'd advise anyone to take it slow. However, there are a few good ones

out there, who really aren't into all these shenanigans. At least that's my experience.

Really believe that knowing the future creates a boring life, no surprises any more. Remote viewing opens one up to things that one would rather not know. Powers of healing, brings all kinds of sick people around from all over the place and you end up tripping on them. Disciples, needy and clinging. More and more I think that it is all about gaining the ability to hang in there and keep it together in the face of life's shit-storms. I especially like the ability to make people laugh at the absurdity of it all. You already have that power.

[...]

There is a big difference between being an influencer with a blog and being a guru. But the same kind of thing applies. I never tried it because I never really had anything meaningful to say. If I said it, then there always seemed to be a certain "falsness" to it. The influencers have a canonical form, that requires talking more than listening, and feigning listening, which is taken as agreement, when maybe it's not. Which is dishonest. Charisma is a way of crapping on half the people you meet in such a subtle way, then they thank you for it.

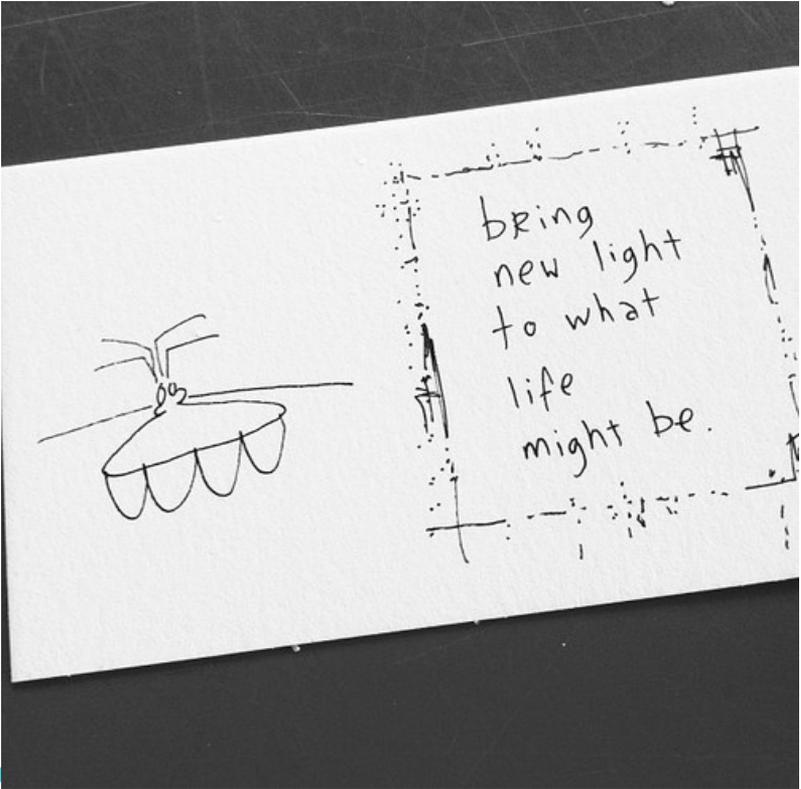
Yep. That sums up a lot of my feelings. Something about the job-title, "Guru" just kinda makes me queasy. I just don't think I like the baggage, the "karma" that comes with it; I just don't think I like the guru-nomics of it all.

I don't want to write for DISCIPLES, I want to write for MY PEERS. There's a difference, a BIG one.

i.e. I don't want to write about how I can help random people do great work, I want to TRY to do great work myself, and CELEBRATE other people who are ALREADY doing it.

You don't get successful because some enlightened being told you how. You get successful because somehow circumstances forced you to ACTUALLY put your balls on the line. And this has always been the case.

But maybe I'm weird for thinking that...



#### *44. HOW TO REALLY USE THE INTERNET.*

I remember my first really big Internet "A-Ha!" moment like it was yesterday.

It was about a decade ago, just after the DotCom crash, around the same time I first heard about blogging.

I had just heard from somewhere that [Salon.com](#), one of the first big-time magazines to launch exclusively online (that was still a big deal in those days) had blown through \$60 million setting itself up, before the crash. Was it ever expected to make back its investors' money? Of course not.

Sixty. Million.

Then I heard from somewhere that [Arts & Letters Daily](#), a blog that appealed to the same kind of reader as Salon, had been set up for a couple of grand; I think \$10K was the number.

People would tell me at the time that yeah, of course Salon was more expensive. It had an office in San Francisco and a big staff of proper journalists. It had all the overhead of conventional magazines, minus the paper and printing press. A&L Daily was just an aggregator blog that pointed to interesting bits and pieces across the web.

Yes, that was true, but as a random, semi-educated dude looking for a place that offered me something interesting to read on a regular basis, I preferred A&L Daily to Salon.

As far as I could see, A&L Daily was not only a better product, it was offering its better product for ONE SIX-THOUSANDTH the cost of Salon. For 0.0166% the overheads.

The idea that media could now be viably made for not just pennies on the dollar, but MICRO-PENNIES, hit me like train. BAM!

So I started blogging. The rest is history.

Ten years later, my only disconnect would be, with this amazing opportunity that hyper-cheap media offers us, why are so many of us squandering it?

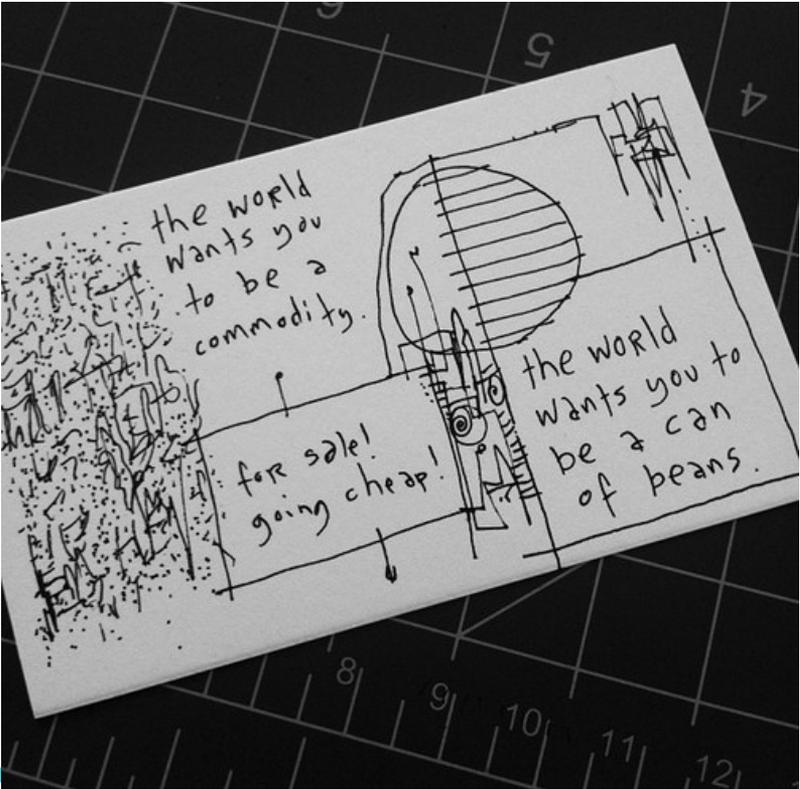
While others Twitter or Facebook or Foursquare for hours on end about what hipster food truck they've just been to or what dumb TV show they just watched, my young cartoonist friend, [Austin Kleon](#) is

using social media to transform his life and career (and the lives and careers of others).

This is a totally different league of Internet use I'm talking about. And Austin is just one example. So am I. So is [John T Unger](#) or [Willo O'Brien](#) of [Willotoons](#) fame. I could give hundreds of others.

The Internet has given you a HUGE, life-changing opportunity that simply didn't exist a generation ago. Don't waste it. A life just surfing the net for hipster-friendly dumbass stuff is no less a waste of a life than sitting in front of the television.

The way to use the Internet is to be more like Austin or Willo or John. Use it seriously.



#### 45. LEARN HOW TO PRESENT.

Earlier today I was thinking of certain “thought leader” friends of mine, people that I know personally. Rockstars in their field.

Seth Godin, Guy Kawasaki, Kathy Sierra, Gary Vee, Prof. Brian Cox, Joi Ito, Ben Hammersley, Doc Searls etc.

Looking for a common thread, it suddenly hit me— besides being hugely talented in their field and the aforementioned rockstardom, what else do they have in common?

SHORT ANSWER: PRESENTATIONS. They’re all REALLY REALLY good at standing in front of a crowd and wowing them. Every one of them. I’ve seen them. They knock your socks off. No wonder they get invited to speak at TED, SXSW and other places. No wonder they’re able to command the big bucks for doing so.

And then, when you look at the great world-changing figures in history, you see the same. Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Cicero, Winston Churchill, or Shakespeare’s fictional Henry V (“We band of brothers, we happy few” etc.)- it’s right there, front and center. The presentation.

And then if you read your ancient history, what were the most privileged people in Rome and Athens taught how to do as part of their classical education? That’s right. The art of Oration. Again, presentation. This explains why getting on the debating team at Oxford or Harvard is still considered a big deal for anyone in the know.

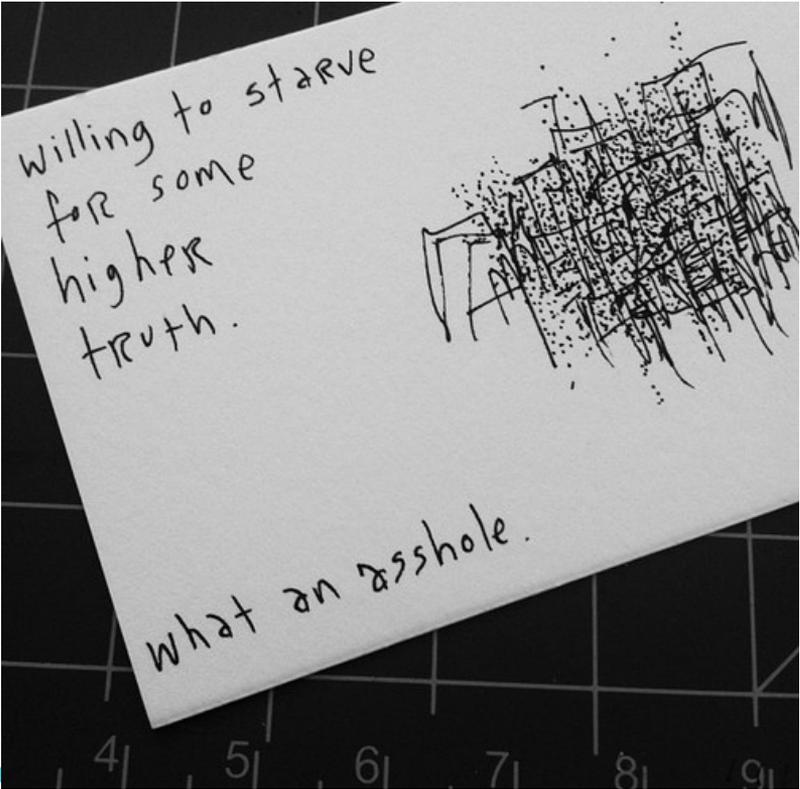
For anybody who ever aspires to lead.

So the question I’m asking is, if presentation is SUCH an obvious part of the magic leadership formula throughout the ages, and leadership is so integral to success, why isn’t presentation better taught in schools nowadays? Why aren’t third graders taught how to use Powerpoint, as standard? Why isn’t presentation emphasized as highly as say, grammar or history or math or athletics?

The reality is, the average person doesn't spend one-hundredth the time working on their presentation skills, as they do on their hobbies or watching TV or going to the gym or whatever.

I think that might be a mistake...

*[AFTERTHOUGHT: Yes, I know. Presentation isn't everything. Steve Jobs's legendary keynotes wouldn't be nearly so impressive if Apple products sucked etc. But that's not an excuse, either.]*



#### 46. AVOID DRAMA.

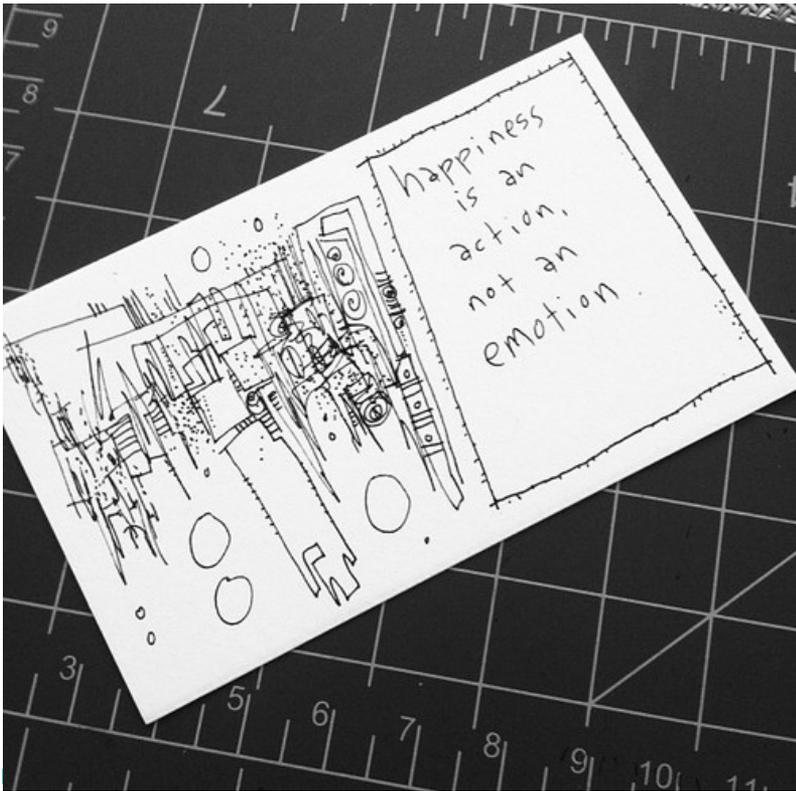
Why are some people such drama queens?

Why do some people get so obsessed with the little stuff, the gossip, who said what to who, who's sleeping with who, who's no longer sleeping with who...?

*The short answer: Because it gives them something to do.*

Life is short. You'd think we would have learned by now, how to make better use of our VERY limited time here on Earth.

Apparently not...



*47. KEEP IT NEW. KEEP IT FRESH.*

The Internet changed my life. Totally, utterly transformed it. Of course it did. In a very short period of time. A couple of years, tops.

And then there's also my Internet-famous rockstar friends: Those who, similar to myself, somehow managed to create these interesting, web-enabled, prosperous, functioning little online micro-empires of their own. Internet mavens like Robert Scoble, Doc Searls, Mike Arrington, Seth Godin, Brian Clark, Sonia Simone, Loic Le Meur etc etc.

If you read gapingvoid, chances are you know what I'm talking about. You're probably one yourself, or if you're not, you're probably aspiring to be more like that. At the very least, you'll probably have a few friends like that.

In other words, this "Internet-Transformed Life" is not something alien to you. You GET it. It's around you all the time.

And heck, even if you're not one of these so-called rockstar folk, your life has still been transformed utterly, whether you're aware of it or not. You may not be "Internet-famous", but try imagining your life without it. Try going a year without Facebook or Google or Twitter or even email and Internet access. Imagine going without it while still holding down your current job and getting your bills paid.

I'm guessing that would be difficult.

It certainly would be impossible for me. I don't even want to think about it.

Hey, guess what? This state of affairs is permanent. It's never NOT going to be transformative, it's never NOT going to be changing everything and utterly central to fulfilling your needs. Certainly not in our lifetimes.

The Internet is here to stay, and it's constantly re-inventing itself, and the world that surrounds it.

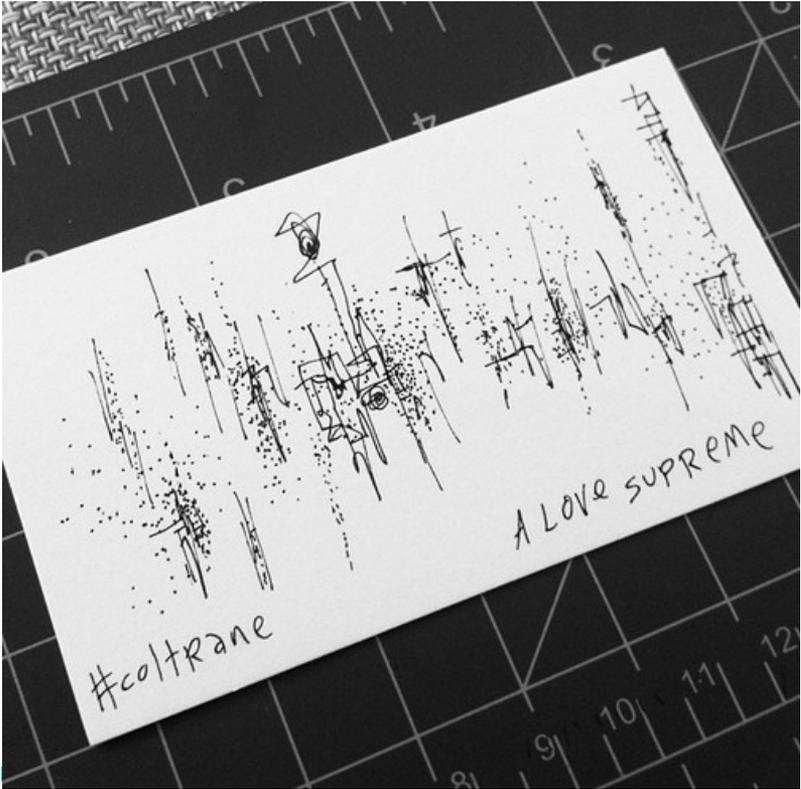
And yet we still take it for granted, even after all it's done for us. It's only been available en masse for little over a decade and already it's no big deal. Twitter and Facebook? Dude! That's so 2007!

It's a mistake to think like that. So blogging is past-tense. Same with Facebook or Twitter. Who cares? The Internet is SO MUCH BIGGER and long-term than any of that. That's like comparing a bottle of Perrier with the Pacific Ocean.

If the Internet doesn't seem new and fresh to you, you're doing something wrong, end of story. You are basically extinct, end of story.

That's my advice to any adult, regardless of age, class, race, nationality or gender.

Keep it new. Keep it fresh. By any means necessary.



***48. TO MY JADED VETERAN BLOGGER FRIENDS: GET OVER YOURSELVES.***

People think that blogging has changed a lot in the last few years, far from the heady early blogging days of 2000? –?2005 etc etc.

Hmmm. Maybe. Certainly having things like Twitter and Facebook make it easier for people to natter to each other without having to write continual blog posts first... the latter is certainly time consuming, and people are already way too busy.

Actually, the business model for gapingvoid hasn't changed very much over time. I can only handle so many projects at one time– a dozen at

the most. So as a way of generating business, I only need enough readers to attract one new possible collaborator every so often.

Which works out to be how much? Maybe one out of ten thousand readers. Or something.

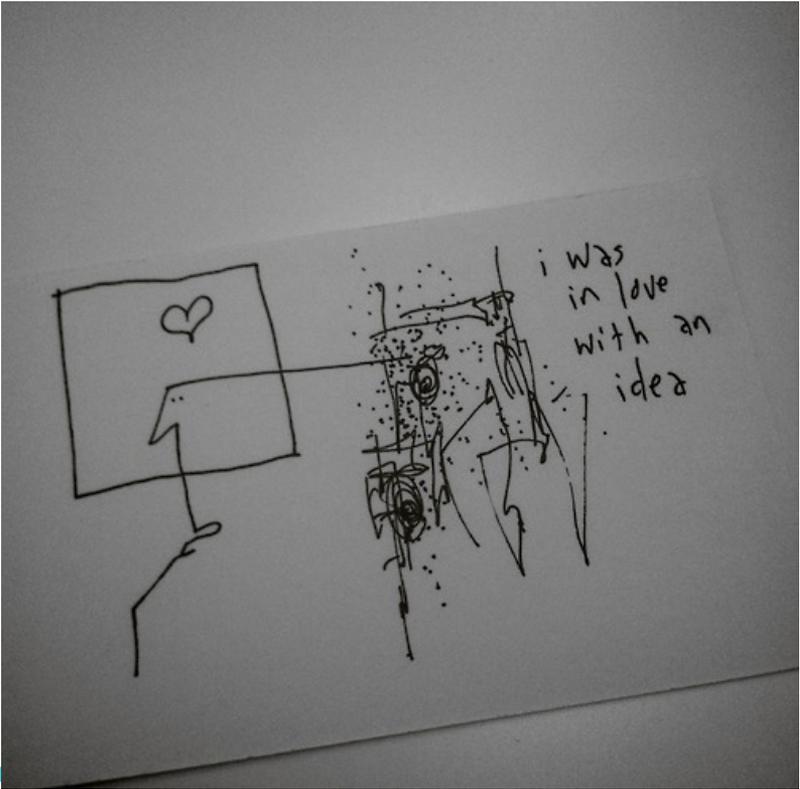
Whatever the final numbers might be, compared to the ad-driven blogs like Gawker or Techcrunch, they're relatively small ones. And Thank God for that, "Audience" is a bitch.

And then there is the fun of drawing and posting cartoons on the blog. In business terms, that really can't be measured. All that can do is create good karma. But I enjoy it immensely so what the hell... same is true for [the daily newsletter cartoons](#).

I keep hearing the same complaint a lot these days. That blogging isn't as much fun or as interesting as it used to be. It used to be subversive. It used to be cutting edge. Now it's mainstream and boring. That kinda thing.

To my jaded veteran blogger friends: Get over yourselves. Blogging hasn't changed, you have. What's happening on the Internet isn't important; What's important is that the world knows how you intend to change it. Right here. Right now.

Same as it ever was...



#### 49. *WINNING IS FOR LOSERS.*

Everybody wants to be on the winning team.

To to paraphrase Bob Dylan, some people don't care what team they're on, so long as they're winning.

People who like winning more than they like the actual playing. I've been around those people all my life. Most were forgotten, by me and everybody else.

Some people don't mind if they win or lose, as long as they don't get hurt.

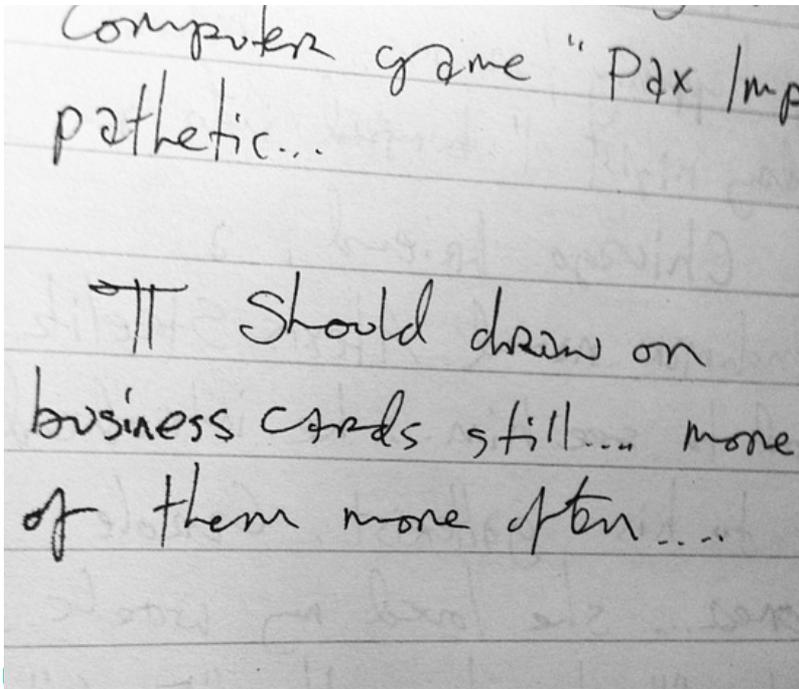
Some people don't mind losing, so long as they get to play the game they want to play.

And then there's the people who want to win, and win big, but ONLY if they somehow manage to improve the game overall.

Not just raise THEIR game, but raise THE game altogether. Even if when they're losing, they seem to manage it.

Those people have the most fun. They're also the most fun to play with.

And they also seem to win the most, over time.



[Diary entry, May 2008]

### 50. BEWARE OF THE BIG MOMENTS.

Though I started doing my [“Cartoons drawn on the back of business cards”](#) in December, 1997, it took me a few months to really get into it... as this photo from my old 1998 diary shows.

At first, I thought I should just do a few dozen of them for kicks and giggles, then move on to something else.

That I’d still be doing them 15 years later, didn’t even cross my tiny little mind.

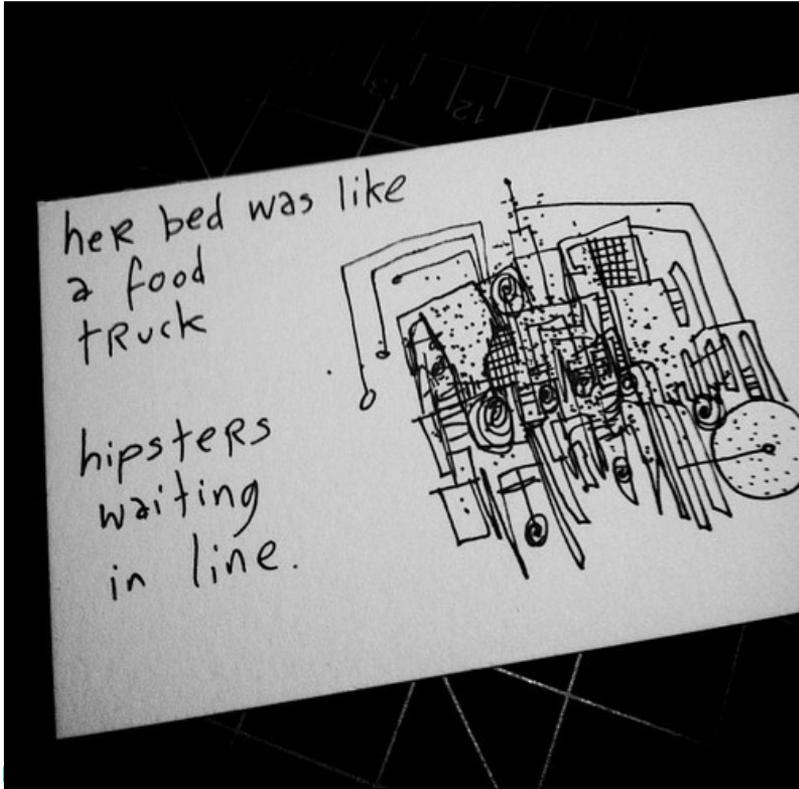
But then it took on a life of its own. Its meaning, purpose and scope snowballed slowly over time.

**The lesson here is, be careful of seeking out “The Big Moments” on purpose.** Because when the big moments actually happen, they don’t seem very big at the time (like the one in the May, 2008 diary entry above). And too many moments that seem big at the time, often end up going nowhere (“The Failed Superbowl Ad Graveyard” is full of those).

Of course, the more you love your work, the less you need (or want) the “Big Moments” to sustain you. **What you really end up needing (and wanting) is just to wake up fresh every morning, and get busy without a lot of fuss.**

“Simple. Easy. Happy. Boring.” Exactly.

*[So far I’ve drawn over 10,000 of the business card cartoons. [You can see the latest ones on my Tumblr page](#) etc.]*



### *51. AVOID FRIVOLOUS COMPLEXITY.*

Aaaargh. Don't get me started on complexity; don't get me started on "Stuff".

Everybody wants to be successful. The bad news is, we are trained by society to associate success with "Stuff".

Not just in the material sense (fancy cars, big houses, trophy wives, expensive mistresses, hot tubs, designer furniture, designer clothing, designer kitchens with Italian marble floors, fine wines, art collections etc), but also "Stuff to do":

Dinner parties, ladies' luncheons, social climbing, networking, cocktail parties, second homes, community involvement, political activism, PTA, Soccer Mom'ing, complicated love affairs that go nowhere, unsuitable dalliances, social intrigues, obsessive gossiping, cooking classes, yoga classes, pottery classes, creative writing classes, tennis lessons, tango lessons, poker games, theatre, symphonies, art openings, magazine launch parties, opera, epicurian delights, horse breeding, ethnic restaurants, wife swapping, cult joining, celebrity worshipping, name-dropping, online forums, online rants, online dating, Instagramming, Twittering, Facebooking, blogging, cool hunting, culture-vulturing, Summers in Tuscany, Autumns in New York, Winters in Colorado, weekends in San Francisco... a totally full schedule, jam-packed with "Stuff", all day long.

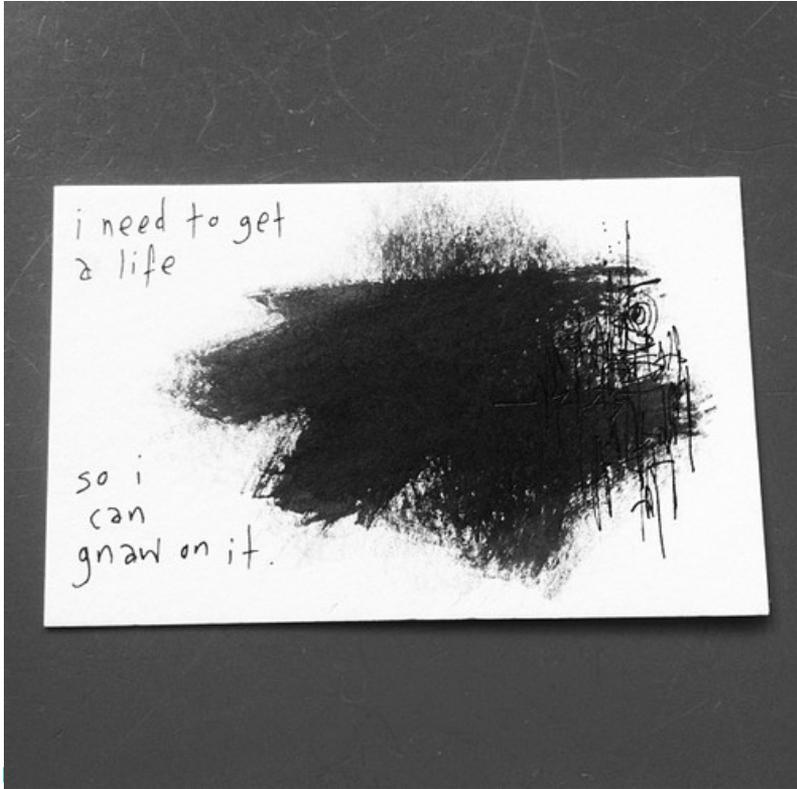
And we don't just stop there! Because we now need our total, never-ending "Stuff" fix, it's no longer enough to have our personal lives crammed with "Stuff", we need to cram it into our professional lives, as well:

More product features, more product upgrades, more marketing campaigns, more advertising campaigns, more junk mail, more focus groups, more endless meetings that start at 7am for no reason, more memos, more mission statements, more white papers, more working weekends, more brainstorming sessions, more blue-sky thinking, more team-building exercises, more PowerPoint slides, more sharp-dressing employees with fancy job titles, more visually-pleasing personal assistants, more prestigious office addresses, more buzzwords, more catchphrases, more infographics, more international conference calls, more office politics, more hysterical emails sent at 2.am.

Stuff, stuff, stuff...

Which is kinda strange, considering the most successful and happy people I know generally don't live that way. The most successful and happy people I know are very good at ruthlessly editing out "Stuff" from their lives. They tend to live calmly and quietly, like a New England pond on an early morning in August.

Leaving only time for the important “Stuff”...



*52. THE PRODUCT DOESN'T GET TO KICK ASS UNTIL THE USER KICKS ASS, FIRST.*

I remember the day, back in the early 1990s, when I first came across the great business writer, Tom Peters. Most TV shows are forgotten within hours of watching, but this one still stays with me, two decades later.

Tom was doing a PBS program on the Mittelstand, those amazingly plucky, medium-sized German companies that somehow manage to compete successfully on a global level, in spite of their relatively small size.

Tom was interviewing [Horst Brandstätter](#), the owner and CEO of Playmobil, the famous German toy company.

And this is the part I REALLY remember— to paraphrase:

TOM: Hmm... These Playmobil toys of yours... they do amazingly well, all over the world. So what's their secret? What do they do that's so interesting?

*HORST: It's not what the toy does that's interesting. It's what the child does with the toy that's interesting.*

BOOM! A moment of clarity. One that sticks with me, like I said, twenty years later.

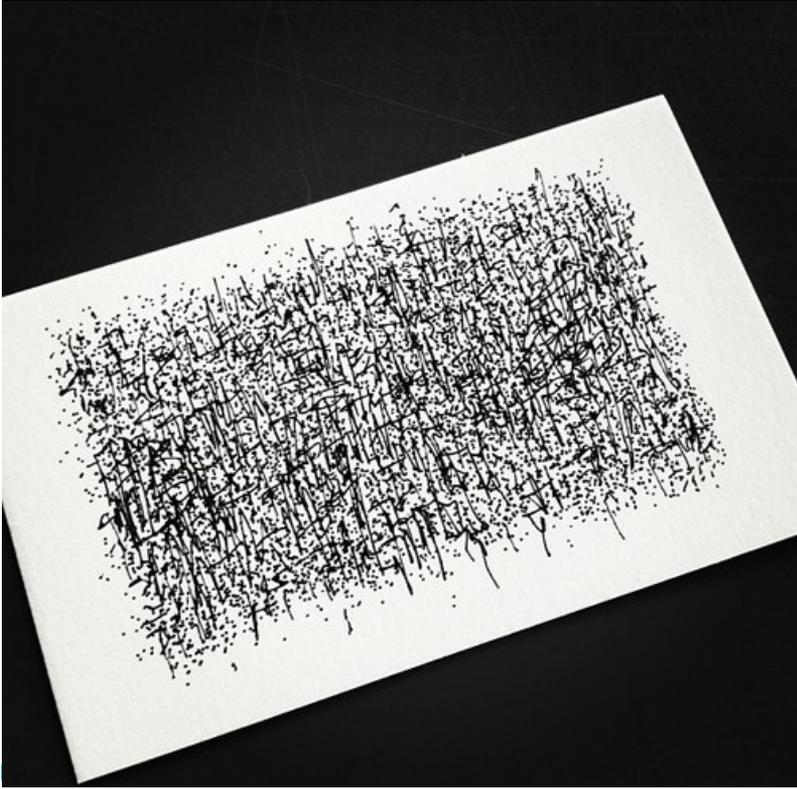
When I was doing [that cartoon work for Intel last month](#)— “A processor is an expression of human potential”, I was still thinking about what Horst had said, all those years ago. Very much so.

What Horst said is true, whether you're running a small mom n' pop cheese emporium in Greenwich Village, or a multibillion titan like Intel: *To borrow heavily from [Kathy Sierra](#), the product doesn't get to be kick-ass until the user kicks ass first.*

Don't talk about yourself. Talk about something else. Aim for something higher. Talk about the user. Remember Playmobil. Never forget the child playing with it.

I know I like to yack on endlessly about “It's all about human potential.” I know its cliché, but then again, I'm not wrong, either. This is why we exist. To find out.

Thanks, Tom...



*53. FOOD IS MEDICINE. SO ARE PEOPLE.*

Karma is spiritual. But it's also emotional and physical. Be careful about what you let into your body, into your brain, into your heart.



#### 54. FOLLOW YOUR BLISS.

After a decade or so since I last devoured his books, these last few weeks I've been happily, gloriously rediscovering the work of [Joseph Campbell](#), the famed mythologist.

My story is a common one among Campbell fans. A clueless, socially inept, lost kid with no idea about what to do or where to fit in the world, and suddenly along comes Joe Campbell with three simple, life-changing words:

“FOLLOW YOUR BLISS”.

Boom! A moment of total clarity. A moment of incandescent lucidity.

Of course! FOLLOW YOUR BLISS! What else is there worth doing, besides that? How better to spend one's life?

At the time, it made total sense. I mean, REALLY!!!!....

I only first heard of Joseph Campbell the day I read his obituary, back in 1987 (A fact that still makes me sad, I'm not quite sure why). I then checked him out at the bookstore, and I found his work, quite frankly, mind-blowing. Transformative!

A floodgate of possibility being opened. Whoosh! Like being hit by a spiritual tidal wave.

But the thing is...

*Joseph may have told me to follow my bliss, but he never told me how. He really didn't have to many concrete tips or pointers. He just told his readers to just do it.*

Much to our chagrin, it was something we were just going to have to figure out all by ourselves...

I was a bit intimidated by that. I think we all are, when we first encounter Campbell's work. Do we have what it takes, do we have the guts to take what he said, make the necessary sacrifices etc etc and ACTUALLY apply it to our own lives?

I remember that fear well, a quarter century later...

So, now that I'm older, now that it seems I've followed my bliss pretty well, and it also seems to have panned out pretty OK for me creatively and careerwise, I now have young people asking me the very same question that Joseph's students once asked him—*"How do I do follow my bliss?"*

*Experience taught me well that there's is no definitive answer. There is no instruction manual.*

You just decide to do it, and then you go and do it. Or not. Whatever. It's your call. It's your path.

And it takes as long as it takes. Decades, maybe. An entire lifetime, even. There is no timeline. Nor any guarantees that you'll succeed.

Nobody can do it for you. Nobody can go there for you— that mysterious place where the central energy of your being finds its source. Yes, you may fail in your quest to find it. But that risk is what makes it so damn powerful and interesting.

And Joseph Campbell would've told you the exact same thing.

Thinking about this earlier this evening, I drew the above cartoons just for the heck of it. I hope people will like them, but I'm fine if they don't. Those little squiggly abstract drawings I do; well, that's my bliss. Your bliss is something else. Your bliss is your own, not mine or anyone else's.

*Bliss. You have it within you, we already know that. The question is what you're going to do about it.*



**55. MAKE SURE TO LEAVE A MEANINGFUL BODY OF WORK BEHIND.**

It's a very sad and poignant story that's [already been all over the Internet](#)...

A British advertising veteran, Linds Redding, a guy not much older than me, gets terminally ill.

Shortly before the poor man dies, he writes a long, heartbreaking, brilliantly savage and honest rant about his thirty years in the advertising business:

*So was it worth it?*

*Well of course not. It turns out it was just advertising. There was no higher calling. No ultimate prize. Just a lot of faded, yellowing newsprint, and old video cassettes in an obsolete format I can't even play any more even if I was interested. Oh yes, and a lot of framed certificates and little gold statuettes. A shit-load of empty Prozac boxes, wine bottles, a lot of grey hair and a tumor of indeterminate dimensions.*

Everything he railed against, I saw with my own eyes during my time in the business. Linds was right on the money. I was more fortunate than he, I managed to get out early; I managed to figure out a way to get paid to do my true calling i.e. cartooning.

But it was tough. I had some pretty bleak, penniless years there for a while. It was nasty. Most people would not have gone through it willingly, I sure as hell didn't.

Luckily for me, the Internet came along eventually and changed everything yada, yada, yada. But I know a lot of people both inside and outside advertising, some I consider good friends, who weren't so fortunate (Linds is an extreme example). The world changed, and ate them for breakfast. And now they're old and frankly, it's probably too late for them.

But it's not the being old and being "eaten for breakfast" that's really heartbreaking. Everybody gets "eaten" sooner or later. That's just life, we all get old, we all get sick, we all die.

I can't speak for Linds, I didn't know the guy, I'm sure he was a lovely fellow who, like the rest of us, did the best he could. I'm so sorry for him and his family.

What is heartbreaking about his story is it reminds me of something that has always haunted and terrified me since I first entered the working world: **the idea of getting to the inevitable end of your life, and in spite of all that talent, passion and energy spent working**

insane hours for decades, you don't have a meaningful and lasting body of work to be proud of, money or no money.

And that can easily happen, when, early on in the game, you decide to take the easy money. When you let your path be defined by short cuts, short-term needs and the outward assurances of social status.

When you do things just because they look good on paper, just because they impress your peers.

This is not a rant against the advertising business; it's a great choice for some folk, I personally got a TERRIFIC education out of it.

No, this is a rant against something MUCH larger, i.e. a rant against not "**following your bliss**", to quote Joseph Campbell.

Luckily, there's no law saying that you have to make the aforementioned short-cut decision. There's another decision you can make.

The question is, will you make that decision? **Will you actually follow your bliss?**

Only you can answer that.

## 56. ALL ART IS RELIGIOUS ART.



Long before I acquired even the faintest interest in modern art, I was down visiting my dad in Houston, hanging out with a college buddy, Andrew. We were both about twenty at the time.

Looking for something to do, Andrew suggested we should go see the [Rothko Chapel](#), and so we did. I had never heard of either Rothko or the chapel before.

When we got there, all I saw were these big, dark, blank canvases, not unlike the monolith in [Kubrick's "2001"](#).

I didn't get it, frankly... I walked out, unimpressed. Some big, black rectangles. Any half decent house painter could've made those. So what?

But the visit stayed with me, somehow. For reasons I couldn't explain, for weeks afterwards I couldn't get the Rothko's out of my head. The paintings struck a nerve, one that I didn't even know I had.

Nearly three decades later, I think I now know why. By painting these big, black monster paintings, Rothko was trying to get the viewer to "gape into the void". He wanted us to contemplate "The Mystery", the awesomeness (good or bad) that is Creation, that is the Divine, that is the Universe.

Decades later, I realize that all art— the good stuff, anyway— is trying to get us to do the same thing: Understand the immensity of existence, whatever that might mean.

Do you have to be religious to do that? Of course not. No matter what you believe, call it either God or The Void or the Physical Universe or something else altogether, the immensity is still there. What Werner Herzog calls the "Ecstatic Truth" is still there.

And it'll always be a mystery; your existence in it will also remain a mystery, no matter what the clever folk in the TED videos may tell you.

So I wrote that line down, "All Art Is Religious Art".

All art is trying to be a conduit... of Ecstatic Truth.

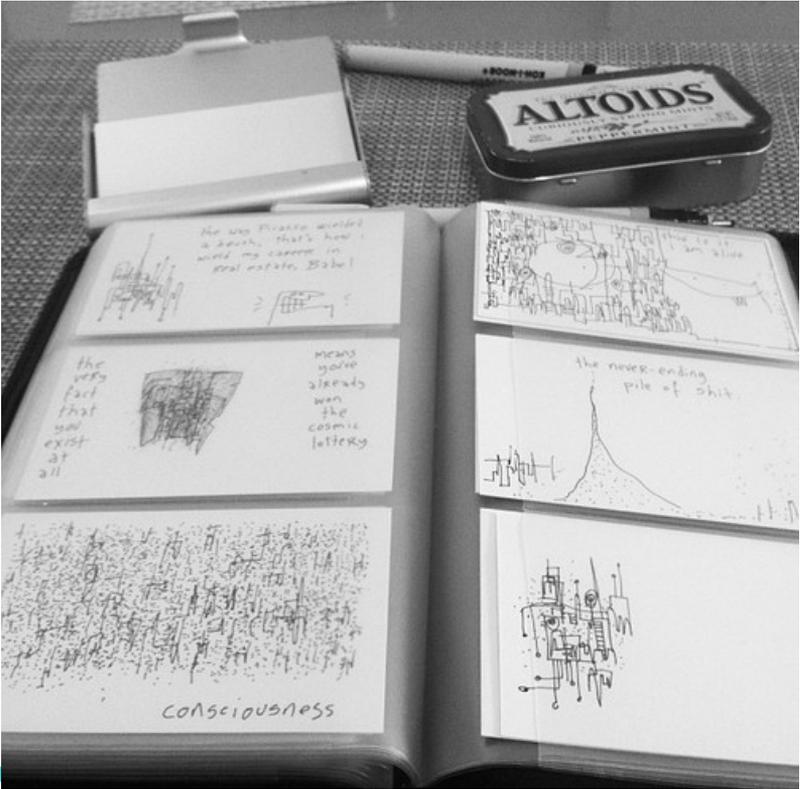
You don't have to agree with me, but the older I get, the more I believe it myself, the more I want to live like it IS true.

And we are here. And it's immense. And it's a mystery. And...

And maybe it applies to stuff other than "Art"? Like maybe some of the stuff you do, to make a living, perhaps?

Maybe what you do for a living is more meaningful than it sounds.

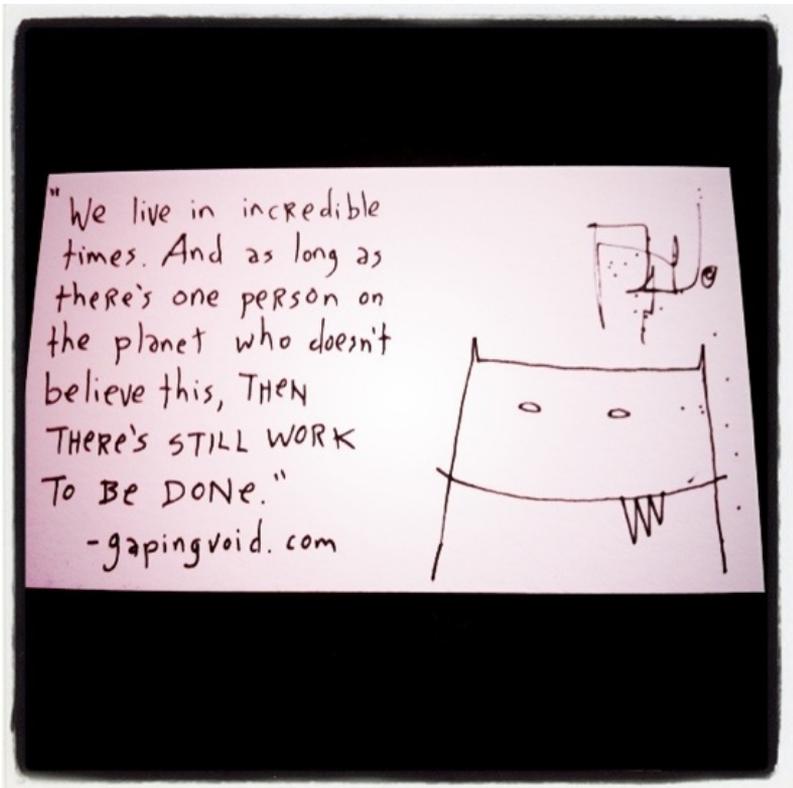
Just askin'...



[This is my bliss— Drawing [cartoons on the backs of business cards.](#)]

[[Note: If you like what you see, please subscribe to my daily cartoon newsletter, thanks.](#)]

## About gapingvoid



I'm Hugh MacLeod. I'm a cartoonist. Occasionally I write books.

I got my start drawing cartoons on the backs of business cards.

My company, gapingvoid was founded by me (CCO) and Jason Korman (CEO) to effect change in business using my distinct style of art.

We offer bespoke services (including gapingvoid CultureMail), which you can read more about on the gapingvoid homepage.

Clients include Rackspace, Intel, Cisco, Roche Pharmaceuticals, Babson College, Techcrunch, Dewar's Whisky etc.

We also have a [daily cartoon newsletter](#) that makes a lot of people happy.

People ask, as an artist, why are you so obsessed with the office? And I answer, **because that is where the action is**, that is where we all need the most help.

Sure, there are other places where the human drama takes place: homes, bars, restaurants, schools, shops, the street etc. But considering how central business is to our lives, **I find it odd that more people don't understand how important art can be to the work environment. So gapingvoid is on a mission to help them understand this better.**

If you just want to say 'Hello', feel free to [email me at hugh@gapingvoid.com](#), anytime.

If you want to talk business, then it's probably best to please contact Jason, [at info at gapingvoid.com](#). We look forward to working with you. Thanks!